

A fine novel
from the new
Russia by
A. Tarasov-
Rodionov.
Translated from
the Russian by
A. Malamuth

* * *

CHOCOLATE

This is a novel of the more idealistic aspect of Bolshevism, the idealism that has inspired so many recent films, and as such it is perhaps the most sincere, moving and artistic novel to come to us from Soviet Russia.

There is no direct propaganda here. This is a simple human story, remarkably rapid in action, set in an atmosphere of civil war, intrigue and social chaos. The author shows us how the very simplest deviation from a strict principle, however natural, may bring about a man's downfall and death—in this case the deviation was no more than the acceptance of a few pounds of chocolate. The characterisation is so vivid, the mesh of circumstances that entangles him so true to real life that *Chocolate* should live as the finest fictional presentation of the ruthless idealism of early revolutionary days.

CHOCOLATE

A NOVEL BY

ALEXANDER TARASOV-RODIONOV

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY CHARLES MALAMUTH



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CHOCOLATE

PART I

As the girl awakened she was bewildered by the grey mesh her opened eyes beheld. Shivers coursed through her frozen body. Her nervousness was aggravated by the prickling numbness of the foot that had been curled under her while she slept. She felt trapped by some vague, ominous power. Suddenly a sharp pain gripped her heart and the nature of her surroundings became clear: the hard, narrow bench, the fur coat that had slipped to the floor, the muff that had served as a pillow, and the profound silence broken by unfamiliar snores. On the other side of the wall drops of water trickled one by one at measured intervals and fell mournfully into a pan.

Helpless and lonely, she was again moved to tears. But after a night of weeping she could cry no more. Her aching throat felt strangled and bitter. She stretched forth her numbed leg gingerly, picked up her cloak and listened with apprehension.

If I could only stop thinking! If I could only stop thinking!

But from somewhere under the bright auburn curls, now dishevelled and lustreless, another small voice reiterated with icy insistence: *You must think, you must think! Suppose they come to-day, take you out and shoot you?*

Again she shuddered, her body suddenly clammy with perspiration.

In the corridor on the other side of the wall someone was walking. She listened intently, like a small alert mouse driven into a blind corner in a vain attempt to escape the cat. The footsteps were measured, unhurried; their sound drowned out the monotonous *drip-drip* of the leaking water-tap. The steps approached the door, grew increasingly louder, went past and died away. Her terror subsided, but her heart continued to throb fearfully. Through the windows, grey in the dawn, the light grew clearer and clearer. The only sound now was the snoring of the men who slept in the corners of the room.

What beasts they are! How do they manage to sleep so peacefully? The night before, five of them were taken out and they have not re-

turned. My God, my God, what has happened to them!

As she thought this, her quick imagination drew the dark corner of the stone yard and the mounds spotted with blood from the bodies of men who had been shot. Never in her life had she actually seen such a thing, not even in pictures, but some time ago someone had told her about it all so graphically that she remembered the story with the vividness that comes only from actual experience.

The Lett said that to-day the fate of all of us will be decided. Five are gone; only four are left. Perhaps even fewer.

She rose, terrified, and began to steal along the walls on tiptoe to investigate. The figure of the stout Ghitanov, wrapped in a fur coat, was outlined near the window, round as a ball. Two steps from him, in the corner, slept Kovalensky, stretching out his long legs under a soldier's overcoat. And farther, near the table, lay the unknown man, his grey, staring eyes gazing with insane intentness at something far away.

And his name is so peculiar: "Finikov!" I have never heard its like! There is something mawkishly sweet, sticky, exotic, about it. And the man himself doesn't seem to know much—

the sort that has not rubbed shoulders with the world. Perhaps it is he who has brought about these arrests!

She remembered how he had muttered "Finikov" quickly and in a dull voice, so that even the Lett, who was writing down their names during the examination, paused to ask the startled question: "What? What?"—"Fi-nikov," the unknown man had repeated with emphasis; and the Lett immediately became calm and transferred his inquisitorial stare to Kovalensky.

Could it be Kovalensky? But how was one to know? You could not read another's mind. Kovalensky, lieutenant in the guard, a fast liver, a man who ran after ballet girls, up to his ears in debt, miserably poor. . . . She suddenly trembled. With whom was this Kovalensky trying to match wits, only to get himself shot?

And Ghitanov—that stout, glossy, well-groomed, and clean-shaven theatrical director, the idol of the young ingénues? But could one expect mercy or even common sense from this bloodthirsty human mouse-trap?

All, all will be shot, and I among them. Why, why? She twisted her fingers and wrung her hands mechanically.

It became cooler. The yellow northern sun, emerging from beyond the rim of the horizon like a drowned man, dewy, clear, crept heavily toward the well of the dark yard into which white windows stared. Again she felt painfully forlorn. Quickly, noiselessly, she returned to the bench, lay down and wrapped herself from head to foot in the soft fur of her coat.

If I could only stop thinking, if I could only stop thinking!

She muttered this to herself through clenched teeth, trying stubbornly to choke the insistent, disturbing thoughts. Her wide-open eyes saw nothing in the darkness within the coat. Suddenly it became pleasantly warm and cosy from her own breath and the soft fur that tickled her nose and cheeks. And the odour of perfume was like new-mown hay on a fragrant May morning.

This must be from my handkerchief which is drenched with tears. It is in the muff which is under my head.

But she did not want to reach for it; her hands were nerveless. How peaceful, light, and cosy it suddenly became! She remembered a soft bed. . . . But perhaps it was no longer a bed, but . . . a meadow, a little meadow under

a linden tree in a green park splashed by the sun, while a small blade of grass tickled her ear. . . . Above in the blue immeasurable sky, as bottomless as a tremendous abyss, clouds whirled and chased one another. But no, these were not clouds. They became the rapidly rolling wheels of a carriage which crunched on the gravel of the garden drive. Her feet were wrapped in a rug which was being adjusted and tucked around her by a charming young man whose hands were gloved in brown kid. She wanted to raise the lashes that hung across her eyes like a mist. She longed to bestow on him a joyous, tender, caressing glance. He was Edward, Edward of the British Embassy. Was it possible that he would not immediately give her a bar of Cailler's chocolate, the kind that she loved to nibble on her walk? She raised her eyes. Good heavens! Horrible! This was not Edward—this was someone else, with a shaven head, with a huge face. Her curls quivered in terror. This was—the Lett . . . that same Lett who had arrested them all! He fixed her with a cruel, hostile sneer. His strong hand pulled the rug off her knees.

"Yelena Valentinovna! Yelena Valentinovna! My dear, don't get excited. They have

come for you."

She heard the thick voice of Ghitanov. He was standing before her, timidly pulling at her fur cloak. He had had time to comb his hair, but he was without a necktie or collar; both of them lay on the window sill, where they had been carelessly tossed. From a corner, his distorted face twitching, Kovalensky stared at her. Near him she noticed the calm, colourless gaze of Finikov. He was indifferent. He was disturbed neither by words nor motions. . . . But all this passed in a flash, as in a motion picture. A little dark man was in charge of everything. *He must be some little Jew.* He stood near the bench; and beside him, like his shadow, was a sentry with a bayonet on his gun—a Red Army man. Yelena jumped as if she were on springs, shook out her skirts, and threw the cloak over her shoulders.

"Take everything along with you," the little dark man admonished her, pointing to the bench.

Why everything? Does that mean I shall not return here? Yelena's heart turned to ice. With trembling hands she threw her silk scarf over her head, seized her muff, pulled on her overshoes. She did not stop to say good-bye.

With hasty, nervous steps she followed the little dark man into the corridor. The sentry lumbered along in their wake. The bewildered eyes of prisoners flashed by them as they passed the cells.

Come what may, let it come quickly.

She suddenly felt hot. Her cheeks were burning.

They went along the corridor and down a staircase. Then they passed through another corridor and by a twisting, roundabout route came out on a new staircase. They went up this. After passing two doors they stopped before a third.

"Stay here awhile," the little dark man ordered the sentry, letting Yelena precede him through the door.

The wall-paper in this room was the colour of Bordeaux wine. Yelena's first impression was of drops of blood splashing into her eyes. A large window with cherry-coloured drapes faced the street. At the window was a dusty bookcase stuffed with papers; at the wall near the door was a table, also littered with papers; in the middle of the room was a huge table. Here sat a well-groomed blond man.

"This is Yelena Valts," said her escort.

The man behind the table raised his eyes. His glance was bored, tired, meaningless.

"Sit down. Right over here."

He moved a chair in her direction. The light through the window fell on her face. The blond man continued to write methodically, quietly. Yelena sat down and the little dark man sat down beside her. The oppressive silence bound them together. Little hammers pounded in Yelena's temples.

Finally the blond man finished his writing, blotted the paper and pushed it aside. He took a fresh sheet of paper, made some notation on it, and asked perfunctorily:

"Your name, occupation, and address?"

His voice was toneless, dead.

"Yelena Valentinovna Valts, ballet dancer, Kapitanskaya Street 38, Apartment 4."

"Why were you in Ghitanov's apartment last night?"

"I've known him for a long time. His old friends in the theatrical world frequently call on him. Nowadays when one is starving—literally starving——" A flow of tears she could not restrain dimmed Yelena's eyes. Through the mist she saw the silhouette of the blond man offering her a bottle of water and a glass.

Yes, yes, I will quiet down immediately. Nothing will happen to me if I only tell the truth? Oh, yes, I know that.

"But what truth do you want? I know nothing, nothing at all."

But the blond man showed her an envelope and pulled a letter out of it.

"No, I have never seen it before. I am seeing it now for the first time."

Then how did it chance to be near the table, right under the rug beside the chair where she had been sitting in Ghitanov's apartment at the time of the arrest?

"Oh, but how should I know!" She felt as if a roll, not of threads, no, but of tremendous cast-iron chains and heavy rope, were crushing her fragile body. This thought drilled itself into her mind.

I am lost!

"I'm lost!" her pale lips whispered.

Her muff fell to the floor. The sharp, intent scrutiny of these two—the calm, blond man and the nervous little dark man—penetrated deeper and deeper, pierced right into her heart. Her hands grasped the table convulsively. Frantic spasms coiled and twisted in her throat. Everything swayed, floated away.

... Again the toneless, perfunctory voice:
"Calm yourself."

Her head lay softly and comfortably on the back of a chair. Her eyes saw the corner of a Dutch tile stove. *Have I been here before? Yes, this is the same room, and the same cruel people, only the glance of the little dark man seems a little softer.*

"Tell me," he asked suddenly, his squeaking voice ringing in her ears. "Who was beside you just before the house was surrounded and the agent of the Cheka entered the room?"

Oh, yes, I remember. I will tell him at once. . . . Should I tell him? Should I betray? . . . How low! . . . Criminal and despicable!

"Bear in mind," said the blond man suddenly, breaking her silence, "we already know the people who were with you. The facts have been established by the depositions of the five men who preceded you here. Your reply will merely bring out the degree to which you were an accomplice in the affair. Your participation in it and the nature of the affair are as clear to us as the fact that I am Investigator Gorst."

So this is he, the terrible Gorst himself!

She stretched out her hand for the glass of water. Her teeth chattered nervously, beating

a tattoo on the sides of the glass.

No, she would hide nothing, nothing, nothing. . . . Yes, the officer Kovalensky *did* sit next to her, but he had nothing in his hands, not a thing—oh, if they would only believe her—no letter, no envelope. She would swear to it by all that is holy and precious to anyone in the world. . . .

"Will you swear even by your life?" Gorst suddenly interrupted her.

"I swear."

"Well, then. Who was next to Kovalensky?"

"Next to him?"

"Yes, next to him."

"Next to him . . . There was no one . . . But somewhat to the side, a little farther away—about two paces away—someone sat on the window sill. What's his name? . . . Finikov."

"Hadn't you met him before?"

The little dark man laughed insinuatingly.

"Oh, as God lives, I had never met him before in my life! Never, never before!"

"Good! What else can you add?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

The pen flew noiselessly over the paper,

dancing a strange and ominous minuet from line to line.

"Listen!"

Well, I am listening. But I don't hear anything. What next?

"Sign your name!"

She took the pen with a trembling hand. It seemed to resist her. Instead of the short "Valts" she wrote some sprawling, twisted word.

"Sit here for a while."

The blond man floated away through a side door, taking the papers with him.

The little dark man, displaying his sparkling diamond ring—how was it she had not noticed it before?—pulled out a cigarette case with a large gold monogram. He remarked carelessly, "Do you smoke?"

She lied to him angrily.

She longed to throw herself on him like a cat, to claw the little dark man's shaven cheeks, and with sharp nails . . .

My God, it's so long since I have had a manicure! I haven't even washed to-day! How hideous I must be!

A thin bluish stream rose quietly in a straight line. The little dark man sucked the cigarette,

but his eyes looked sideways at her neck.

Gorst suddenly opened the door and beckoned to her. "If you please."

Again a chill stole over her. Gooseflesh pimpled her arms. With a frightened glance she obediently followed him behind a tobacco-coloured portière of faded silk that had once been golden. She was in a dark blue office in front of a severe Gothic table. She noted the long narrow shadow of a tall man who stood at the window. He moved to the table and sat down.

"Very well, Comrade Gorst. Leave us alone for a minute. Tell Comrade Lipshaevich that he is to admit no one until I ring. No one—tell him to say just that to the porter below."

What does he want? Yelena was contemptuous.

But his voice was pleasing, deep, sincere. . . . Gorst went out. The door closed.

"I am Zudin, chairman of the local Cheka, Citizen Valts."

For some strange reason, Yelena was not frightened. He seemed an old acquaintance whom she had met unexpectedly on the street, an old acquaintance trying to tell her an interesting story. The cubed twilight patterned in

the wall-paper seemed a distant abyss against the gilded fading silk of the window hangings. The frames of the windows set them off so sharply that the panes seemed non-existent. The white mist of the street and the familiar odour of automobile fumes crept freely into the office. At the table sat the stranger who seemed an old acquaintance, his voice occasionally drowned by the clanging and banging of the street cars.

What is he talking about at such great length? Now she could distinguish his face, thin and sallow, with large eyes, a little dark moustache, and a thin pointed beard. The carelessly shaven throat stuck out of the tight collar of a black shirt over which was a black coat. He must be a working-man. So this is what he is like, this Zudin. Why has he always seemed so terrible? Those awful stories about him! And why have I been brought directly to him? Is the case really so serious? Oh, yes, of course, that unfortunate letter! How terrible! Perhaps they put it there themselves in order to implicate everyone in the affair and then shoot them at random. . . . But what is he talking about? What is he saying? It is he talking—this Zudin.

“Without letting me embarrass you and

without hiding anything, you must tell me everything in detail."

"But what must I tell?"

"What I am asking you: with which of these men have you been intimate and when?"

She flinched as if a whip had struck her face. The colour rushed to her cheeks.

Not for anything in the world! Never! How does he dare! What if I am a ballet dancer!

Her thoughts and feelings were drowned in a flood of tears that unburdened her sorrowful heart.

Where is the water bottle? Why doesn't someone offer me some cold water? He is still sitting there as before—immovable.

"You misunderstood me, Citizen Valts. I have no desire to insult you with my suspicions or to besmirch your honour—the honour of a woman. What I wish to know is your rôle, the rôle you played in *this* affair—not on the stage."

Ah, how quickly the cruel note develops in his voice!

"I want to know your rôle, not on the stage, but the rôle of the woman you played, alas, among these men. Politics is a cruel thing. In the letter that was found under that carpet be-

side the chair in which you sat, murder was mentioned—the murder of our responsible comrades—for political considerations. Moreover, among the documents of certain persons arrested with you in the course of the raid, several letters were found—letters from you. . . . I hope that you will understand now why I must know, and insist upon knowing, your exact truthful answer to my question. Don't let false shame deter you."

But Yelena was silent.

Ah, how cruel this is, how subtly cruel! And how did they manage to find all of it so quickly? My letters? From whom did they get them?

But Zudin no longer looked at her. He had turned to the window.

Perhaps this is better. It is best not to look into one's eyes when speaking of such things. Why am I not questioned by a woman? And yet . . . no, no. Better not . . . Better not a woman. A woman would not understand this.

"Oh, how terrible this is!" she thought aloud.

"People are inclined to passions, and not all of us are puritans. At times our hearts lead us astray. You need not be ashamed of that," Zudin encouraged her. "And so don't be embarrassed by me. Your secret will die here. It

will not even be recorded on paper. This is why I ordered all the doors closed."

How shall I reply? With whom of them have I been intimate?

Oh, yes, the officer Kovalensky. But ... That was long, long ago ... at the beginning of the war. He used to escort her from the theatre, come to her apartment, but then, but then ... They had not met for a long time. He was at the front. Now, however, now ... True, he had been up to see her once. But she had never been in *his* apartment.

"Who else?"

"The comedian Darvalovsky. But you have already questioned him. The comradeship of the stage brings people close to each other. And we ourselves do not regard these liaisons seriously. The same is true of ... Ghitanov. For a long, long time he tried to win my love. He was ... so lovable, so sincere, so amusing ... And besides, he earned a lot."

"And? ... And? ..." He persisted, as if the men she had mentioned were not among those arrested. "How about Finikov?"

"Finikov? No! I have told you already: I met him only once. We were introduced there at Ghitanov's. He was sickeningly polite but

he didn't say a word. We scarcely talked at all, about anything."

Had she received money from men? Again she flushed and tears came to her eyes.

"What do you mean? Must you know *that*, too? Nothing, nothing is sacred? Nothing that a woman may keep as her own secret?"

Had she received any money?

"Ye-es . . . I received . . . a little. From all of them. . . . Oh, if you only knew, Comrade Zudin . . ."

Oh, my God, what am I saying! Come to your senses, Yelena! He is no comrade of yours!

"No, no, no!" she cried frantically to no one in particular. "If you only knew, Comrade Zudin," she continued hysterically, the tears streaming down her face—"if you only knew the life of a ballet dancer! How, from the age of fifteen . . . she is forced . . . Yes, yes, she is forced!—this is the one tradition that the ballet adheres to firmly—she is forced to sell her body to filthy, sweaty men! . . . My dear Zudin! . . . Zudin, my comrade! . . . No, I am sure that your kind would never besmirch me. That sticky life . . . that sticky life has caught us in its dirty claws, ill-smelling, stinking, and there is no salvation for us, no help for us, fouled and

beyond redemption! If only . . . if only I had the opportunity to earn . . . a bit, an honest bit of bread . . . Would I ever . . . ? Oh, but it's useless to talk to you! You don't know the abyss, the utter abyss of the fallen! It was Ghitanov who called me to come to him so as to acquaint me with—what's his name?—Finikov. He said, 'There will be money—much money.' And I was actually starving. Yes! . . . Starving! . . . I had sold my entire wardrobe. This is all that is left—the cloak, the muff, three dresses. . . . My dear . . . My own . . . Comrade Zudin! I was once a high-school girl. . . . I had gone half way through high school. A bit of life . . . not slavery, but life . . . honest life . . . a little bit. I am begging! I am begging it of *you*! I am willing, I long to work! If I had that mite, should I be selling myself? Just a prostitute! That's what I am!"

In an outburst of sobs, racked by grief, Yelena crumpled helplessly and sank to the floor. Her scarf slipped off; her cloak sprawled on the rug. Her dishevelled curls clung to her temples, and only the bright auburn of her hair and the soft pink of her little ear cried to the grey, distant, indifferent sky beyond the gleaming windows of this blue Gothic room, and

testified that here wept a grief-stricken woman.

Quite unexpectedly, her pathetic little hand suddenly sensed the firm clasp of a man.

"Don't, Comrade Valts! Get up. Get a grip on yourself. Calm yourself."

This was Zudin speaking. How glad she was to hear his pleasant voice!

"In the final reckoning, our struggle is a struggle for the happiness of all dispossessed by capitalist exploitation, and therefore, also for the happiness of such as you. . . . Get up and pull yourself together. And if you wish, come here sometime. . . . If you like—the day after to-morrow at one o'clock. I will help you, as I am ready to help any comrade. . . . For the time being, pull yourself together, put your coat on, and go out—you are free."

Zudin pressed a button on his table, and a loud resounding bell was heard outside the door.

2

There was sunshine in the air. The vermilion of the door jamb gleamed. Motes waltzed exultantly in a radiant sunbeam. Soft and delicate

fingers of sunlight caressed his lowered eyelashes. The sun diffused the noiseless, poignant drowsiness of spring.

"Who is that? . . . Valts? . . . On what business? . . . I asked her? . . . Don't remember. . . . Very well, then. Let her in."

The desire to sleep was overpowering. His hands were limp. He could not keep his eyes open; he could not hold his thoughts together. He should go home, sleep, and in the evening return to work.

"Call Comrade Katzmann! . . . Valts? Let her wait awhile."

He turned to the other telephone. "Comrade Plastov, Comrade Plastov! Just one minute. Have you received information from Dynin about that—what do you call him—naval officer who was going to Finland? . . . No? Very strange. Inquire again immediately. You're still laying for them, of course? Excellent! Send the French aviator here for a questioning as soon as possible. No longer possible? . . . What a pity! Well, anyway, I expect you to give your personal attention to this matter and see that the sailor doesn't get away from us.

". . . Here's what, Abram. . . .

"... I don't need you any more, Comrade Plastov. I expect you to report about the sailor in greater detail to-morrow morning.

"... Here's what, Abram. . . . Shut the door tightly now, will you? Well, how are things? You haven't found the English? Those shrewd John Bulls! Well, well, they can't hide from us long. They'll pop up somewhere. . . . What does Planchette report? . . . What's the fellow's name? Mr. Hackey? Oh, yes, Mr. Hackey. Splendid! No kid gloves. He's no Lockhart. If we only lay our hands on him! Here's something else, friend Abram. Pavlov gave me his report on that affair of the gamblers' den. He speaks there about setting such a whale of a catch as Bocharkin at liberty. There's something about this case that I can't quite make out. Suppose you look into this affair yourself. Don't trouble yourself particularly . . . at your convenience . . . That's all for the present. I'll probably be back about six o'clock. If Gorst has had enough sleep, tell him to prepare the case of the Kvashnins for me. I'll question the young one myself. Oh, yes, hasn't Dagnis reported to you? . . . How is he getting on with Finikov? Was he done away with? . . . When? . . . At dawn to-day?

... Good! Send a telegram to that effect to Moscow under my signature. But file it immediately! Well, there's nothing more for the present. Yes, and about Bocharkin, please clear that up. Did you understand everything? Good! Good-bye, until this evening.

"... Hello, operator. 2248 ...

"... Wait a minute, comrade. Let me finish talking on the telephone, and don't let anybody in until then.

"... 2248. Thanks.... Is that you, Comrade Ignatyev? This is I, Zudin. How are you? ... Thanks ... Excellent ... I wanted to tell you that everything came out just as you and I expected. ... Why, of course. ... He was at the bottom of it. ... It had to do with Savinkov.... We discovered it through a woman. It certainly was an involved tangle. ... They were shot this morning. Yes? ... Is that so? ... Good! ... Well, good-bye for the present. ... I'll be there this evening. And in the daytime, call me at the house. I've decided to have a bit of sleep. Good-bye! ..."

He sank back exhausted in the chair. His eyes closed involuntarily, and the sun did not make it any easier to keep them open. It seemed like a spring sun. It beat down on him and

blinded him, playing and crawling with insistent intensity through the windows. Its columns stretched in a fan of luminous dust to the very corner of the room. He could see nothing through the golden mist. Rainbow visions appeared through his weighted eyelashes.

"Is the car ready? I'm coming. . . . Oh, yes! . . . There is Valts. Ask her in."

She was attractive in her brown and lilac Scotch plaid dress. She impressed him as a bit too loud, too ornate, especially in the bright rays of the sun, in the aureole of columns of dry dust which set her hair aflame.

"Sit down! . . . A beautiful day, isn't it? Please excuse me. I am very tired. You want a job, don't you? Let me see . . . Good, good!"

What a pity there are no blinds that can be lowered at the windows here! I must not fail to get them by spring. I am seeing red and green spots on the white paper.

"Good! . . . Let me see. Oh, yes, work. We'll find some work for you. Do you think you'll be able to do filing? . . . Well, now, that's splendid."

The devil take it, how this bell drenches you with sound, like a shower!

"Comrade Lipshaevich, Comrade Valts is

going to work for us. We will try her out on the filing of all the finished cases—alphabetical arrangement of cases and names. Snegiryov can be transferred to current cases, assisting Shalenko. That will be splendid. Where is she to sit? Find a place for her here in that little grey room on the side. Let the archives go—for the present. We'll settle that later on. Well, now, that's all. I'm leaving now. Comrade, you will explain the work to her. So now we'll get our files straightened out. Well, good-bye. Good luck!"

He flew away like a cyclone, scattering and twisting the golden sheaves of sun dust. Below was heard the sound of the starting motor, and the automobile dashed away.

In this office? It does not look at all like the cellar of the Great Inquisitor. My, what sunlight, what sunlight! Sprays of amber! . . .

"Very well, let's begin. Will you show me how? . . . Is your name Lipshaevich . . . Comrade Lipshaevich . . . My name is Yelena Valentinovna Valts. But, of course, you know all that."

The motor plunged through holes and ruts, as if bent on throwing its occupants out. It knocked Zudin's cap off, tore his briefcase open. Along the sides of the road the windows flashed by indistinctly like little rabbits jumping over hedges. Water dripped from roofs, sidewalks were slippery, glassy. The shadows were like lilac-coloured boards. They flashed by in fantastic designs. Even the faces of the pedestrians were violet-lined, as if veiled in violet petals. How warm it was! How warm! Even the ice on the frozen river was beginning to break.

The car stopped before a grey house in purple shadows.

"By six o'clock," said Zudin to the chauffeur, as he banged the door of the automobile behind him. At a run he mounted the steps. The windows were dazzling with reflected sunlight. A timid bell rang out.

"This is I, Lisa. . . . To tell you the truth, I've only come to get a little sleep. I haven't a minute to spare. My head is splitting. Allow fifteen minutes for dinner. Wake me up when

it's ready. What do you have to-day? . . . Peas? . . . Splendid! Nonsense! . . . They'll go down without butter. . . . Well, Lisa, let me go now. We'll talk another time. Let me sleep."

What a fine spring day it is! Can't hide away from the sun even in the bedroom. If I can only pull off my boots.

"No, don't worry. I'll be very careful. I won't crumple the bedspread. Mitya, my dear boy, I wish you'd go to the dining-room with Masha. I'm going to sleep for a minute. . . . Lisanka, call Masha . . . only for a minute. When I am asleep they can go on playing and raise a rumpus—even fire off guns. Well, all right, you may kiss me, but don't squeeze me too hard. . . . You say your shoes are worn out. All right, I'll get you new ones . . . by Easter."

"Tssssss."

"He's asleep."

Lisa hushed the children.

"Mitenka, pull the blind down. Take your book and go into the dining-room. Let Papa sleep. Papa has been working very hard . . . Take Masha with you. Amuse her with some pictures. And in the meanwhile I'll set the table. Dinner will soon be ready."

Slowly, distinctly, the clock ticked away the

palings that separated one passing moment from another. Time rustled under the sway of the pendulum.

The clock struck three.

"Lyosha, get up!" said Lisa to her husband.

"What? Who? . . . Later. Go away!"

"Lyosha! You're oversleeping. Get up. We're going to have dinner. Masha, pull Father by the leg. Mitya, don't jump!"

How I hate to get up! Brrrr, I'm cold!

"Rather cold," he said. "Or is it because I've just been awakened? Well, I guess I'll have to drag myself to the table. There's no help for it. . . . My, what a mischief little Masha is! She's made off with my spoon. . . . Eh! Why, we're having a holiday dinner. It seems like soup with meat!"

"Do you know, I was afraid that the horse meat might spoil outside the window: It's so warm to-day. The snow has melted and all the roofs are dripping buckets."

"So you cooked it all? Eh, Lizok! It's rather awkward to ask for more than our rations. Well, can't do anything about it now. Come on, let's eat. Do you happen to have some mustard with it?"

"What a bourgeois!"

"Yes, yes, a bourgeois."

"Did you ever get mustard when you worked in the factory?"

"Life was bitter enough without it."

"And now has it become so sweet that you must have mustard?"

"Well, I don't know. We've made improvements over the old days."

"We used to have more of things then. You could buy butter in any store. But now, just see for yourself——"

"There you go again. And you're supposed to be a Communist!"

"What if I am a Communist? A cause is a cause. I'm not complaining. I understand the situation. I understand it all very well. . . . But Lyosha, my darling, don't be angry with me! One can't get along without any fats at all. Mitya and Masha are growing. Just look how pale they are! Skin and bones. Is this how they ought to be fed? We've always been poor ourselves; still, when we were their age we got much better food. And so, you see, my heart aches for them. They are our children! And if I mention it to you, you bristle right away."

"Well, now, what do you expect? Rivers of milk right away?"

"There you go. It's hard to talk to you."

"Mitya, stop playing with the fork."

"Rivers! I'm not asking for rivers. But you might ring up Ignatyev. Or, if you would just ring up the secretary . . . There's nothing terrible in that. One might think we were indulging in unnatural appetites, to listen to you! Everyone who is somebody gets more than the normal rations. Just look at it fairly. What do you think you look like yourself? Even when you were in exile you looked a lot better. It's simply ridiculous, that's all it is! You work like a beaver, night after night, and you feed like a sparrow on lentils. And this is just what's the matter with a dictatorship of the proletariat! Be careful that this mess you're cooking doesn't boil over on you!"

"My goodness, what a quibbler you are! You'd better wipe Mashutka's nose over there. She is all messy as a result of *your* dictatorship! As a matter of fact, all of your indignation is utter nonsense. We're not the only ones who live like this. Hundreds of thousands are even worse off. What will they say if you begin to butter your bread? As it is, there's a lot of grumbling in the factories. They say that the commissars live like lords. You know

there isn't a log of wood in the city, but what about us? *We* have some."

"Is there any use talking to you? We haven't had the tiniest piece of soap for two months. We walk around in unwashed clothes. You might have got at least a pound if you had listened to me."

"If I had listened to you! If I had listened to you! . . . To-day, for example, a bourgeois woman—a ballet dancer—kept after me with her tale of woe. She'd be glad to sell herself to the first passer-by for a piece of bread. She almost got mixed up with a nest of spies. She missed getting shot by a hair's breadth. The only thing that saved her was that she probably hadn't had the time to come to terms with them. And all that, just for a piece of bread, for a few pennies. I gave her a job in my office, became philanthropic. . . . Why do you look at me like that? . . . I'm not joking."

"Well, see that she doesn't get the best of you master minds!"

"Don't worry, she won't. Mitka, you little rogue, bring me a cigarette. It's in my overcoat pocket. Never mind, I'll get it myself."

The rays of the sun crept from the bed to the wall along a diagonal across the frame of the

open window, touching the wall-paper with fingers of gleaming brass.

"Who took the receiver off the telephone? Now listen, children. You're the plague of my life. Suppose someone tried to reach me by telephone, and here I haven't heard them ring!"

"Don't be angry, Lyosha. I'm the guilty one. I did it myself. A man must have some rest . . . Shall I get the samovar ready?"

"Yes. But do you know, I think I'll take another nap. I have a lot of work to-night. But as soon as the car comes, be sure to wake me up . . . Ach, Mashutka, Mashutka! Have you been playing too hard again? Here you've rubbed a hole in your shoe. And you haven't any stockings on!"

"I've been telling you over and over again that the children have no stockings."

"Yes, yes, yes. . . . But what shall we do about it, Lisa? Just wait. We'll break down the blockade. . . . And then . . ."

"Well, go to sleep. I'll wake you up later."

"Mummy, what's a blockade?"

"Quiet! Papa's sleeping."

Zudin slept while the children quietly climbed up on the window sill to watch the

fading sun sink behind the roof. The sky bloomed with multi-coloured petals. The dirty little yard flared in a brief moment of glory; the sun's last luminous smile reluctantly left the wall. A restless breeze sprang up, grew stronger and stronger, became a wind that plucked feathers out of the clouds and scattered them over the sky. The samovar in the little kitchen began to sing in a thin, small voice.

The light faded out of the sky. In the gathering darkness a trembling star winked furtively—a little star like a drop of a jewel swinging delicately from the end of a thin thread, fearful lest it fall to the ground and splinter. Mitya and Masha looked up with little open mouths. Their breath was on the window pane; their breath veiled the twilight.

4

Yelena Valentinovna gathered all the papers, put on her cloak, and started down the stairs.

Lipshaevich was waiting for her on the landing.

"Don't we go the same way? Where do you live? On Kapitanskaya? That is very near my

place. Do you mind?"

They walked off into the growing coolness of the evening, swaying together over the slippery sidewalks. He was dressed in well-made military trousers and smart high boots that showed under his stylishly cut coat. Flourishing his sparkling ring, Lipshaevich began to talk about the theatre, about the drama, about the ballet. When Yelena slipped at a crossing, he took her arm and did not release it until they reached her house, breathing heavily in her ear, while his eyes grew soft, like butter on a warm day. They parted at the gate, and Yelena quickly disappeared through the wicket, ran across the dirty yard, oblivious of its filth, admiring the little star that was turning green in the sky. She walked up the familiar steps to her lodging, knocked at the door, and in response to the querulous shuffle of slippers within, answered firmly, "It is I!"

"An old acquaintance of yours called," the landlady informed her, puffing clouds of cigarette smoke in the darkness.

"An acquaintance?"

The magic of this fairy-tale day instantly vanished.

"The one who used to come so often last

year. He left a package and a letter. He was frightfully curious about you; I told him everything."

Yelena heard no more. Quickly snatching the key, she ran to her room. There on the table lay a large package, wrapped in paper, and a lilac-coloured envelope. She lit the candle hastily and with a trembling hand broke the string of the package.

"My God! Chocolate! There must be twenty pounds of it!"

She slit the envelope with a hairpin.

MY LOVELY NELLIE:

I came to town accidentally and brought something for you. Of course I could not forget so soon how my little kitten loves to nibble chocolate, and how long she has had to do without it. But now I have learned from the landlady that my lovely little pet has walked right into the tigers' den and become one of them! Well, well. Good luck!

If this is in earnest and irrevocable—then let this chocolate be a last remembrance of me.

But if it is only a passing caprice, a daring and very dangerous whim, and my little kitten has remained as ever my playful and carefree little pet—then (at the very moment that you read this page I am watching your window, unobserved, from the yard) please communicate your answer to me. You must carry the light from the table to the window and immediately blow it out.

Then go quietly to the back door and open it for me. The landlady must know nothing about my coming. Until we meet again. I am waiting: either—or; either with the tigers against me, or with me.

Your own tender

EDWARD.

P.S.—I will not wait if the answer is delayed, but will quickly go away—forever.

E. H.

The sheet fell from Yelena's hands.

What was she to do? What could she do on such short notice? Outside the window was Edward, shaven, clean, well-groomed, graciously and delicately solicitous. Indeed, on the table before her was his chocolate. What was she to do? Give him the sign? . . . Yes? But there, in the large red and blue office, was He, the master of her new thoughts, so responsive to her, this Zudin who was so terrible to everyone else. What was she to do?

"I will not wait if the answer is delayed . . ."

Oh, let come what may! She will not be indulging herself; as a matter of fact, she cannot deny herself the privilege of exchanging a few words now with Edward because of the other man. She cannot appear discourteous, ungracious, ungrateful.

Dear, dear Edward. He is risking his life at my window, while I . . . ?

Like a butterfly, the light of the candle flew from the table to the window. Two seconds—and suddenly everything turned to darkness.

5

Snow fell, ending the thaw. Clouds swelled in the sky. The snow fell in heavy, shaggy flakes on the street. Iron shovels, scraping before doorways, cleared away the trampled frozen thaw.

The band had stopped playing. Through the veil of falling snow black clouds moved into the mist, stubbornly trampling the shaggy snow with hundreds of feet. Stumbling occasionally, they walked straight ahead. . . .

Flags flapped like faded rags as the snow-storm clawed them with its wet, white paw.

"What is the purpose of it all?" she asked in a trusting, timid voice. Her words floated out on her warm breath.

But the cold words of response fell like the flakes of snow, intent on extinguishing the warmth of her tone.

"What do you mean—the purpose? To conquer!"

"Well, and then?"

"‘And then’ will not be soon."

"Are your enemies so strong?"

"But do you know who our enemies are?"

Yelena sensed derision in his question and whispered in a hurt voice:

"Whiteguards, manufacturers, landlords, Finns, Poles . . ."

"Nonsense! All these are negligible. Our real enemies are much more dangerous."

"More dangerous? Then it is not an empty phrase that your task is to conquer the whole world?"

Again, instead of answering her, he asked her a riddle:

"But what do you regard as the world?"

"I have not forgotten my geography. France, England, Germany, America, China—well, in a word, all the countries."

But he was decidedly out of temper that day.

"Even if we were to conquer them, we should still not possess the whole world!"

Yelena was embarrassed. She fell silent. But again and again burning thoughts would burst

forth into provocative words.

"Yet, it would be good to think that we have conquered the whole world, and that we are—Russia!"

"Nonsense! We don't need such conquests."

"If not these, then what? What, Alexey Ivanovich?"

Zudin looked at her and kept still. Was it worth while to bother himself with elementary propaganda? If he had to talk, he preferred to speak as he had done in the past—in the dim light of a bare little room before the smudged faces, intent eyes, and open mouths of straightforward, serious workmen, like himself, the kind that used to be. They were *his* kind; they would understand with all their being before he half uttered his thoughts. But what was she? . . . He looked with astonishment at this elegantly dressed, delicate woman who walked hastily beside him, slipping on the snowflakes that covered the street. Yelena's dark eyes were drowned in her overhanging eyelashes. Only her little lips, parted enticingly, revealed her teeth, small and gleaming like white jasmine flowers. She was a lady, soft, warm, and her very warmth was inviting . . . Yelena in an opera cloak, Yelena perfumed . . .

"Do you want to know where our chief enemies are? I will tell you. Within ourselves!"

He met her mischievous, intriguing glance, quizzical, certain of something that was her own—the caressing glance of her eyes that were the colour of chocolate.

"Yes, within ourselves," Zudin continued with increasing irritation. "In our inner yearning for the past, for the life that has been, for the rags of the past, for the habits of the past. This is where our enemies are! . . . Ah, if people could only look at the world in a new way, then the world itself might become new and better!"

"You talk as if you were quoting the gospels."

"The gospels have nothing to do with it. We expect no help from heaven! We are gods ourselves!"

His words were whips striking at something delicate, fragile, dear. He was tortured by the desire to beat, to flagellate what was before him with his sharp, implacable words.

"Are you angry?" she asked softly in a subdued voice.

Zudin felt her warm little hand touch his own cold one for a moment. He said nothing.

“Why are you angry, Alexey Ivanovich? Well, suppose I am backward, stupid. . . . That is why I ask you these questions. . . .”

I am ashamed of myself. Why have I lost my temper? How silly it is! On whom am I revenging myself, and for what? What is the matter with me?

He felt a confused, warm feeling within him. At the same time he was tortured by shame of himself and of this feeling. And all these people whom he met looked at him as he walked through the snowflakes along a bleak street, side by side with a woman who slipped over the ice as she walked mincingly on her toes—with this elegant Yelena Valentinovna, Yelena in her cloak, Yelena perfumed.

In that case, why did I return from the demonstration, and go back to the office with her in the first place? And yet, I did go, and I went very willingly. Now it serves me right if inner voices rouse prejudices and false shame.

“It seems to me,” Yelena continued, “that both in the gospels and in your words there is the same thought about the perfection of the inner nature of man. The enemy is within us. How then is one to reach perfection?”

She is not as stupid as she seems. She has hit

the nail on the head!

"We shall reach perfection under the new order after we have destroyed the yoke of slavery and the exploitation of the capitalists."

"Well, but meanwhile . . ."

"What about meanwhile?"

"What are we to do with the enemy that is within us?"

"With us, he is practically reduced to nothing. But whenever we find him in others we cast him out."

Clenching his fist, Zudin struck at the air jerkily. Yelena became silent, and seemed to bend under the weight of her reflections.

"I don't believe that this is possible," she burst out, speaking distinctly, tossing her head with a stubborn gesture. "Alexey Ivanovich, if all the people would tell one another the truth, honestly, face to face, they would have confessed long ago that this intimate feeling of self-love, and these tendencies toward various comfortable—well, let us say, habits, which have come down to us as an inheritance from thousands of ancestors—in a word, all of this pleasant civilization, this comfort that you despise—don't shake your head; I am sure that you despise it—all of this civilization—after

all, it is a part of our I, of our body, of our being, and to kill it . . . No! Impossible! . . . This is why——” She stopped, and for a moment her caressing glance seemed to penetrate to the depths of his eyes. “. . . I bow my head before you, before your sacred greatness. But I myself do not believe in your Communism. . . . No, I don’t believe in it!”

Slowly she turned her eyes away. Both of them now looked persistently at the ground under their feet. She continued:

“Don’t you admit to yourself, to your innermost soul, that you have your own personal interests, your personal needs, your personal advantages? And is it not because of these that life becomes more colourful, more beautiful? I should be sorry for the man who would have nothing of this. If it were so, we should have a false emptiness, only the shell without the kernel. And it is just this kernel which is every person’s holy of holies. This is true of me, and it is true of you. Take, for example, your family.” A cold note stole into her voice. “Your wife, Elisaveta Vasilievna, is the dearest of women. Your children—well now, aren’t these your own, narrowly personal attachments? And is it possible that it could be otherwise?

This sense of personal possession is much stronger within us than it appears to be. But, for some reason, we are ashamed to confess it. Surely you will not try to argue that it would be a matter of utter indifference to you if some passing ruffian would forcibly exchange his soiled fur cap for your karakul hat?"

"We don't deny that there is such a thing as private ownership for use," Zudin argued in some confusion, beginning to feel displeased that Yelena had mentioned his wife. He was troubled again by a thought that frequently puzzled him: why is it that women so quickly become friends? His Lisa and Yelena—what could they have in common? But ever since the time that Yelena had happened to bring the papers from the office to his apartment, she had been coming rather often to see his wife in the evenings while he was still in the office. Something attracted Yelena to Lisa, while Lisa herself had become a different person. With increasing frequency a strange note had begun to sound in her thoughts. And Yelena? Here she was, walking at his side, radiant in her fur cloak, in the thinnest of open-work stockings, exhaling an inscrutable aroma which drew Zudin more and more. . . . And again he felt

awkward at being seen with her. Presently they would have to walk up the stairs together back to the office, past scores of attentive eyes that would greet him with the diffidence which would turn to insinuating derision after his back was turned. Inevitably people concocted . . .

Ahead was the familiar grey corner, the path deserted by timid people. At the entrance was a sentry. At the gate another sentry. . . . Zudin hesitated. Just then he noticed with relief his automobile at the entrance.

"Yelena Valentinovna, please tell them upstairs that I have gone home for a few minutes to have dinner and will presently return. . . . Panteleyev, let's go home."

Covered with melting snow, the chauffeur pressed his horn, and in response to its sonorous roar his assistant ran stumbling from the entrance. The worn-out sheepskin coat, the fur cap with earmuffs flapping, and the thick black leather gloves were the same as Panteleyev's. A sleeve brushed the snow off the seat. Zudin entered. The assistant cranked the motor. The heart of the machine began to pound nervously. The doors clicked shut. A quick push, and they were off.

Whirling snowflakes beat against his face, closed his eyes, while in his brain was a turmoil of confused thoughts, chasing one another like the snowflakes, arising out of nowhere, vanishing into nothing.

"Wait for me, I shall be back in about twenty minutes."

6

Blessed saints! How dressed up Lisa is, wearing her best dress, her light curls as fluffy as whipped cream!

"What is the occasion?"

She smiled playfully. "It's the celebration of the victory."

"Of course, of course. You know, sleepy as I was, I went straight from work and mingled with the crowd. I walked with the people from the central region to the Square of Zarev. They were all our crowd. But I didn't go to the session of the Soviets, you know. There is altogether too much urgent work, and so from there I went back to the office with Yelena Valentinovna and just came home for dinner. The machine is waiting for me downstairs."

"You know, Lyosha, Yelena Valentinovna

and I talked until late in the evening yesterday. I tried to persuade her to stay overnight, but she felt awkward about it. Really now, she is a very sincere girl."

She bustled about, talking merrily as she clattered with the dishes. Mitya and Masha had already climbed up on their father's lap.

Bah! Their little mouths are sticky.

"What is this?"

"Papa, that auntie gave us chocolate," Mitya cried exultantly in his ringing voice, while Masha, closing her eyes playfully, opened wide her mouth and revealed a huge piece of chocolate melting softly.

Lisa blushed deeply. The spoons fell from her hand.

"I hope you aren't angry, Lyosha? Yelena Valentinovna is so understanding, so good. . . . She brought us a load of presents. Just think of it, nearly two pounds of chocolate! Real, foreign-made—try and get it here!—for the children. Just taste it! Also she brought each of them a pair of strong lisle stockings—long ones. . . . Just look at them. . . . And do you know, she brought me——" Guiltily she dropped her eyes and stared at the tablecloth. ". . . it was so awkward, but I couldn't very

well refuse. She was really frightfully hurt. . . . She made me a present of two pairs of fine thin silk stockings. . . . Look!"

Shamefacedly, her cheeks burning, she stepped back, lifted her thick skirt, and coquettishly revealed her firm legs encased in transparent brown silk. Then impetuously, as if suddenly unable to endure her shame, she threw her arms about her husband's neck.

"How awkward!" Zudin frowned. "Yes, awkward, embarrassing. You know, after all, she's my employee, my subordinate. It would have been much better, Lisa, if you had taken nothing. . . . It looks like a bribe!"

He sprang up in aversion.

"Lyosha, how dare you say such words! Aren't you ashamed! Look me straight in the eye and say: 'Lizochka, forgive me; I am ashamed of myself.' Why don't you say something? Judge for yourself. Yelena Valentinovna—and a bribe! Think of it! Why? What for? Do you mean to say that I cannot be friends with anyone who is your subordinate at the office? Can't I exchange a few words with them? Or do you think I didn't decline the offer? But she kept on insisting: 'I have been a ballet dancer, an actress. I have so much of this

silk trash, all of this old refuse that I have never even worn. Trunkloads of it. Now I have a job; I can't wear it all; what shall I do with it? I tried to sell it. How can you refuse such a trifle as a gift?" "

"You call this a trifle? How much does it all cost?"

"But Lyosha, she hasn't bought any of it! She told me that herself. She has a whole storehouse of stockings from pre-war days. . . . She boasted of it herself. . . . The two pairs of children's stockings belonged to her married sister who has a little girl, but they went abroad long ago. The chocolate, the candy for the children, she said, was brought to her by an actor of her acquaintance who has recently returned from Archangel with an army theatrical troupe. She told me that we took a lot of that stuff after the English evacuated. Everybody who happened to be there got as much of it as he could carry away. The actor himself—that acquaintance of hers—brought her almost forty pounds of it. Is it possible that because of this trifle, this utter nonsense, you are angry with me? Are you angry, Lyosha? I assure you that I offered to pay her for all this, but she flatly refused and was so insulted that she even flared up."

"She is evidently proud, not like you!" Zudin snapped.

"Lyosha, Lyosha! So this is what you are like! This is how you love me! Anyone else would have been pleased that his wife received a gift, that his children got some much-needed stockings and managed to get the sweets they haven't known for ages. But you? ... Mashka, Mitka, throw the chocolate back at your father! He doesn't want you to have it! Let him take it away from you. He is a dog in the manger; he won't have anything and won't let anybody else have it!"

Mitya pouted sulkily, pulled out of his mouth the piece of chocolate he had bitten off and placed it on the table. Mashka suddenly became angry, turned red, and broke the heavy silence with sobs and screams. The melted chocolate dripped from her mouth, and perspiration broke out on her forehead.

"My baby, my darling, my little daughter! Stop it, my joy!" Zudin burst out.

He caught the little girl in his arms, pressed her close to him, rocked her in silence, ran panic-stricken up and down the room. He patted his little daughter tenderly on the shoulder. His face was twisted in pain as if the

grief of the child, whose sticky mouth was soiling the collar of his coat with its flood of bitter-sweet tears, were in his own heart.

"Mitya, take the chocolate. Eat it and enjoy it. . . . Why drag the children into this? . . . The children have nothing to do with it!" he muttered irritably, while his wife, scolding angrily, poured the steaming soup into the plates.

"Do you mean to say that it's forbidden to accept presents for the children from a comrade?" she snapped at him.

"From a comrade?" Zudin mocked. "Since when has she become a comrade of yours?"

"Since she began to work for you in the Cheka!" his wife replied sharply, angrily flinging a fork on the table. Encouraged by her clever reply, she taunted, "Or do you take climbers there?"

When the sobs of his little daughter had subsided, he placed her on a chair next to him, then he silently stroked the head of the sorrowing Mitya. Only after that did he begin his dinner, quickly swallowing the scalding soup without looking at his wife. As if replying to him, she too ate noisily. He finished the soup and the unbuttered, unsalted kasha and rose quickly.

He opened the door into the kitchen. There on the table he found a china teapot with the blue inscription "Grand Hotel" and a broken spout. He took three sips of lukewarm chicory tea, wiped his lips, and thoughtfully watched a cockroach crawl along the stove. Then, without glancing at his wife, he mechanically put on his overcoat in the front hall, banged the door, and ran down the stairs.

7

The snow had stopped falling. A bleak twilight filled the city. Here and there solitary lights flickered.

The searchlight of the automobile cut through the mist ahead as it lurched over the streets. Zudin wanted to enjoy the smoke of his cigarette in silence, without thinking, but a vicious, stupid dissatisfaction welled in his heart. Something, somewhere was not as it should be. What, and where—he did not know himself.

True: someone has given the children chocolate. Can't I share their joy? How bright their faces were! How their eyes blossomed with joy!

Lisa has received a present of stockings from a woman friend of hers. . . . If I were she, I should not have taken these things, but she . . . ?

How many long, tortured years of poverty we've had in the past! I was an unemployed, an underground revolutionary worker, an exile in Siberia! How much sorrow and want we knew, fighting stubbornly to realize our ideal of happiness for the working class! Has not Lisa been a faithful support for me, always unselfish, and bearing all difficulties in silence? Suppose now she yielded to temptation and has accepted some trifle that women make so much of

Women are all alike. Why have I treated her so coarsely, so cruelly? I have always wanted to be so "understanding"!

He remembered Lisa and how she had stepped back, shamefacedly lifted her heavy skirt in order to display her new acquisition before her husband.

Of course she had to dress up, ape the others, try to be fashionable. How can I be angry with her? Well, she cannot live up to proletarian standards. She was tempted by stockings and fell all over herself. Seems that women are all alike!

Something stung his heart to the quick. He

could see his wife pulling that transparent stocking off her feet. He saw himself lying on the bed, while she, sitting on the edge of it in her petticoat, was pulling off the stocking. The dull yellow strands of her hair spread like a huge sponge. He could not see her grey eyes. Her hair-covered shoulders that were becoming increasingly heavy with the passing of time. There was the odour of sweat. A bedbug crept down the wall. . . .

Zudin checked himself and flung the cigarette away. Angrily, irritably, he remembered with what venom his wife had cut him when she had snapped: Do you take climbers into the Cheka?

I? . . . Climbers?

Just then the automobile, humming softly, rolled up to the entrance at which the sentry stood, and stopped.

Well, and Yelena Valentinovna?

Zudin slowly went up the broad staircase. A single electric lamp lighted the dirty marble steps and the dusty, dried-up palm that stood in a corner of the spacious landing guarding a pile of cigarette butts.

Well, and Yelena Valentinovna? Why has she started all this?

Zudin took the key from the old charwoman, Agafya, and opened the door of his office.

"Who is on duty to-day?" he asked.

"It's that young lady—what's her name?—Valts."

Zudin passed moodily into his office. He turned the electric switch of the ornate candelabra that hung from the ceiling, pulled the curtains to shut out the violet light that came through the windows, and sat down at his table.

The wall-paper seemed now a faded dove colour, a strange hue. The window curtains fell in warm, gold and amber folds, lovingly setting off the dark brown grain of the oak furniture that looked up with Gothic sharpness toward the decorated ceiling, gay and warm in the radiance of the candelabra.

Zudin looked through several portfolios and, selecting a thick report, knit his brows and lost himself in study. From time to time the silence was punctured by the rustle of a page turned over.

The soft, subdued light of the lamp caressed everything; the documents, the wall-paper, the

portfolios, and a disordered pile of various things scattered by someone over the floor and in the corners. Here was a heap of sabres and rifles sent by someone from somewhere; there, papers tied together, bundles of letters left beside large suitcases, and about a score of dusty bottles that contained confiscated wine.

•Zudin sat for a long time, rustling the pages, making notes on a piece of paper. Then he yawned, stretched himself, and rose. He began to meditate.

He could not remember when he had been as desolate as now. He felt that someone had gone away somewhere, or that he himself had to go very, very far away . . . yet he didn't want to go. . . . Or, in some deserted little village, or perhaps in some forsaken castle at the front, he had been left behind to maintain communications and had to make the best of a soldier's lonely lodging for the night.

I'm tired out. It would be good to rest. Spring will soon be here. Perhaps it will be possible to obtain leave and go off to some little village where there is the odour of grass and straw and chickens, where in a cool shadowed arbour I could sleep like a rock on broad peasant pillows, scarcely hearing through my dreams the

songs and laughter of playful girls on the other side of the wall. When I awake I shall run down from the yard past rows of dewy cabbage across a low meadow to a shallow river. There leeches wriggle in the reeds on the banks of the clear and sparkling stream.

I shall take off my clothes and cautiously walk across the hard sand into the myriad sparkles of sun-flecked water. Gushing springs and warm sun will touch me playfully, running over my body like gay, eager, flashing eyes. . . . Eyes. . . Yelena? . . .

Why am I trembling so? . . . Why does this thought flash madly through my dreams like a charge of electricity? . . .

Agafya, puffing, carried in an armful of wood and dropped it on the floor near the stove. The iron door creaked as she opened it. She placed the wood neatly inside where it coloured immediately under the blush of lighted kindling. The stove began to puff, crackle, its door rattling. Rays of flame began to dance fan-like on the floor. Agafya, groaning, rose and went away.

I don't seem to be able to concentrate on my work. Is it because I have breathed too much air during the day and am unaccustomed to it?

Or am I tired out by all the bickering? I do so long to lie down, to dream, to go to sleep.

Zudin walked across the soft rug toward the stove, turned off the lights of the candelabra, and sat down on the sofa. The only light came through the frosted glass of the lamp on his desk. The soft light glimmer of quivering rays shed by the flames that broke through the cracks of the stove door cast a reddish twilight over the rug and the sofa and Zudin's knees.

Agafya reappeared.

"The girl on duty asks whether she is to give you the telegrams at once or wait for the secretary?"

"Have her bring them now."

Zudin rose unwillingly and walked heavily to the table. Unperceived, as if emerging out of the deep shadows about the stove, came Yelena, her skirts rustling, lissome, silken, perfumed.

Shadows of the flames in the stove scurried like frightened rabbits over her little feet, turning to gold as they touched her. Her luminous hair framed her face, which was delicate and mischievous like a squirrel's. Her stubborn mouth was small and secret under its soft shy smile. Her thick eyelashes, like the twin fans

of Indian princesses, swept over Zudin; those eyes, brown, caressing, sympathetic—the eyes of Yelena.

He felt again as if the stream, the air, and the sun of the village he had dreamed about were delicately stimulating his fatigued body. He felt a warmth creep through him and was sharply aware of both shame and pleasure.

“Six telegrams all at once!” she murmured softly.

“Good! Sit down, please.”

Without saying a word she sat down in the chair directly in front of his table. He heard distinctly the beating of her heart and the dying whisper of the silk as her skirts sank into the chair. How silly that his hand should tremble as he tore open the envelopes of the telegrams!

Two of the telegrams were from Moscow, the others from the fronts—two from Pskov, one from Archangel, and one from Smolensk. His eyes sped over the lines. Here was a puzzle solved in the case of Gireau; here an inquiry about the Finnish bandits; here another thread to Savinkov's plots in which some Pole by the name of Stefanicki was mixed up; the others were routine inquiries and replies.

"This should be given to Gorst, this to Plastov, this to Katzmann, these two to Fomin. Be sure to let Petrova enter all of them in the records to-morrow morning. And this one—will you please place it in my files with the case of Rosenblatt? The report on the case is here on my table. I have examined it and to-morrow at the session of the Collegium I hope that we shall reach a decision."

While he spoke, he deliberately detained her as long as possible and noted that she did not wish to go away either. When, however, there were no further pretexts for lingering, she gathered the telegrams unhurriedly and regretfully and placed them in a portfolio. The grey silk was taut over her breasts; the sapphire pendant rose and fell as she breathed.

"You were kind enough to give some of your things to my wife. I am very grateful to you for this—really, and my wife is very appreciative. But I hope that you did not intend to offend us by giving us things without accepting something in return. Permit me to pay you whatever they cost."

Yelena remained standing, her eyes downcast.

"If you have decided so mercilessly . . . Do

you insist on paying me for a sincere expression of my feelings? I suppose I deserve this." A bitter smile played on her quivering lips. But she drew herself up haughtily, and with all the composure at her command added calmly, "I really don't know the price of these trifles. I did not buy them."

Her cheeks turned crimson, like maple leaves in autumn. Her eyes, wide-open, glittered dangerously and struck straight into Zudin's heart. She pressed her lips until they were very thin and revealed only a narrow strip of white teeth. There was a quick rustle of skirts as she turned on her heel and was gone: the flames of the stove reflected for a moment on her patent-leather shoes.

A devil, not a woman!

Like a boy playing pranks, he wanted to spring up, overtake Yelena, and press his face against her smooth throat.

It seems that I shan't get myself down to work to-night. I have become soft!

He tried in vain to discipline himself. He could not pull himself together. The silence and the yielding softness of the sofa, rust-coloured in the warm reflections of the glowing stove, drew him like quicksand. Past boxes of dusty

papers, dirt, and refuse, around bundles of guns and piles of bottles, he made his way to the stove and opened its door. Through his clothes, the pores of his body drank in the beating flames that streamed from the mound of red-hot coals.

It would be nice to stir up the coals. They would burn more brightly.

He rang for Agafya.

Unexpectedly Yelena appeared on the threshold.

"You rang? The charwoman is not here. She has gone somewhere for a moment."

"Never mind—I'll wait. Please ask her to bring the poker."

"I'll get it."

Before he was able to reply, she left the room and returned with the poker.

"Don't bother. Let me do it."

She sat down imperiously, spread out her skirts, and began to rake the fiery embers. Quiet, warmth, dim light, the soft cosy sofa, and the elegant woman, like a fairy-tale princess near the stove . . . Lying on the sofa, Zudin felt languid, desirous, yielding.

"How nice it is here!" Yelena said thoughtfully, rising from the floor and placing the

poker in the corner.

He followed her movements with half-closed eyes.

"Shall I leave it like this?" she asked, tossing her head toward the open door of the stove and smiling provocatively.

Zudin nodded silently. He wished that everything—the stove, the twilight, the fire, the warmth, and delicate, fragrant, alluring Yelena—would remain forever as it was—the picture of a simple legend, the fragment of a beautiful living dream.

"Stay." His lips scarcely moved. "Sit down. Here—the sofa. Or there—if you wish—the chair. . . ."

She answered huskily:

"May I?"

She sank down beside him.

Lounging on the cushions, he noted his sensations with amazement—the rapid throbbing of his temples, the strong, sweet pressure on his heart—and he sensed also that currents growing into a mighty wave were bearing him on their flood stronger and stronger toward the dear, desired, alluring, warm Yelena. Moving his hand, he suddenly paused, transported by an exhilaration that was partly joy and mostly

sorrow. Impetuously he touched her small warm hand that somehow lay near by. But he did not withdraw his hand; he let it remain. He seemed bewitched, and trembled as Yelena's slender perfumed fingers began to caress his hand tenderly.

"Alec, my dear, my very own, why did you hurt me so?" he heard her passionate repressed whisper. Through a mist he saw the delicate face, the dark eyes, the firm mouth, open, thirsting, gleaming with its flowers of white jasmine, her little mouth, moist, enticing. . . .

"Alec, I love you passionately, tenderly. . . ."

She pressed his hand impetuously.

"You are my god, my idol, my only one, my lord and master! Oh, never fear, I shall not take you away. Let your family, your circle of comrades, your job, your work, your revolution—everything whereby you live—remain with you. I need so little, so very, very little—your trusting glance, your tender caress, your own personal interest. . . . You are the only one in the world who ever understood me. Alec, I am so lost without you! I have always been so desolate until I met you. Only you, so tender, so terrible, only you *could* understand me. . . . Well, and you . . . ? Aren't you lonely? I know

that you are very busy, with the revolution, the Party, your affairs. . . . But in your heart of hearts, tell me, are you really happy? Do you find in anyone a spark of real understanding, of genuine interest for you? Oh, I don't mean for Comrade Zudin, or for Alexey Ivanovich, or for 'Lyosha,' the husband and father who is taken for granted. No! But for Alec, dear to me not only for your merits, but for your sins, failures, weaknesses, deficiencies, doubts, sorrows. If you would only let me love you for what you really are, making no claims upon you! You see, I ask little. But how much it would mean in my life! . . . But don't drive me away from you, Alec. Don't beat me with the cruel whip of indifference. If I gave your family some sweets, believe me, I merely wanted, with a pure heart, to bring a moment of pleasure to *your* children, *your* wife, and through it all to *you*, only to you. But you? Offering payment! How cruel! Tell me, my very own, my beloved, my Alec—I am all yours—now tell me! . . .”

It seemed to Zudin that the words of Yelena, as she passionately touched his hand with her lips, were running and dancing through his brain; and that before them he was melting like

wax. It seemed to him that a flood of soft, fragrant, warm, sticky lava was spreading over him, filling his mouth and choking him. This was no longer the eager whispering of Yelena—this was rather a strange, growing, clattering inner noise that beat its hammers in his temples—and cold shivers ran through his feet, his hands, his spine, as if Yelena were hovering before him on her toes. Then, in the midst of the growing, ominous buzzing, it seemed to him that this was no longer Yelena, but a terrible dynamo, a machine throbbing with passion, flying in the din of its own swift belts. He stood before it, stricken dumb with the clang and clatter, while the machine roared and called and enticed him with its caressing, plaintive lament. It lured him and called: Leave your smoky, dirty factory! Come! Come closer to me! Look! A chorus of wild blue fires is dancing within me, with increasing passion and strength!

"Take care, Alexey," someone had said, pulling him by the shoulder. It had been a comrade, the oiler, Danila. "Take care that the machine doesn't swallow you. I am talking to *you*, you with your mouth wide open! . . ."

He remembered all this very quickly in one

stormy, fiery moment.

Frightened, Zudin ran a nervous, trembling hand through his hair. Moving deliberately, he rose, left Yelena sobbing on the sofa, and began to pace up and down the room.

How stupid it all is, how stupid!

He repeated this phrase to himself, striving to overcome his excitement and his trembling.

"Could I have been mistaken?" Yelena whispered weakly, pleading with him.

Instead of answering, Zudin moved a cool leather chair toward the sofa, lighted his cigarette, and began:

"I don't know if you were mistaken. That I don't know. But I should like to warn you against a mistake. I am ready to believe that your actions were quite honourable and sincere. . . . But believe me, even as I believe you, I must not yield to the indulgence of carefree passion. I cannot. I should not. In a word—I am sorry, both for myself and for you. But believe me, love is not for us."

Yelena leaped up impetuously from the sofa, and taking two steps on the rug, sank helplessly on the bulging top of a trunk.

"You must not feel hurt. I simply want to warn you against a foolish mistake. Naturally,

I'm not a saint. The coarse and tender feelings, all the instincts peculiar to man are not foreign to me. But I have also something within me, Yelena Valentinovna, something within me that you will not understand—how shall I explain it to you? . . . class feeling! It is an amazing, ever-living, and powerful spring. From it I derive all of my strength, from it alone I drink my dearest and most precious happiness. How this feeling was born in me—I cannot remember myself. All I recall is how, in the dark cellar where I lived with my mother, who was a laundress, watching through the window the feet of the passers-by, I, a ragged child, understood that in the world there were beautiful people in new boots but with hard, dirty little souls, and that there were many, many others who were always barefoot and dirty but who shone with sincerity and devotion. And when the noisy factory with its early whistle became the master of my life, christening us all with its oily soot, I felt that sometime happiness would come even for us black-faced workers. And then I learned, from comrades and books, the roads to that happiness . . . It is not easy for us to follow these roads. The difficulties ahead of us, many, many sacrifices,

mistakes, doubts, waverings, much exhaustion and laziness. Sometimes I am overcome with the desire to lie down on the sofa and forget. . . . But like thunder and lightning, the call of the working class cuts through the fog and gives us new courage. It weaves for us the laurel wreaths of marvellous exaltation. Before it are the dreams of our hearts, a rapture against which the thoughts of women are trifles. It resounds in our hearts with a mighty ecstasy. In its joyous power are reason and emotion. Should I stifle this feeling, change it for something else, forget it? . . . For the sake of the enervating experience of a woman's love? In many places there is a great deal of sweets—like chocolate—but that is not for us. We are not accustomed to it. Its softness disables us for our cruel struggle, and that being so, we don't want it. I hope you will understand now, without being angry, that it is impossible for me to become your lover. So, from now on, we shall control ourselves, take leave of each other, without rancour, and we shall remain what we have been—friends!"

Dropping her head to her knees, Yelena silently pressed her handkerchief to her clenched teeth. The lump in her throat swelled

until she could endure no more and burst into tears. She rose slowly and, biting her lips, went out in silence, softly closing the door behind her.

It was quiet. A sense of weariness and futility came over Zudin. He thought he might try to sleep; he lay down on the sofa and put his coat under his head. Later, dozing, he heard someone who must have been Agafya rattling the door of the stove, in which the fires had died down.

PART II

LIKE fat snakes in a black hole, gossip crept drowsily through the city. It limped with a crippled old woman to the dirty vestibule of a church. It crawled about a flabby man who recently had been sleek and round; now the flesh of his veined neck fell in loose folds around his beaver collar as he sanctimoniously made the sign of the cross over his sagging wrinkles. He suddenly felt a light touch on his back. He turned and bent toward his neighbour who whispered stealthily:

"Do you know . . . ?"

"We . . . know . . . We . . . know . . . We . . . know . . ." The church bells chimed in a superior manner.

In a cracked voice the hoarse deacon read something monotonously. The priest, his shaggy brows frowning, darted among the crowd in his multi-coloured chasuble, swinging the lilac vapour of incense, and bowing before the dimmed splendour of smoky images.

"Have you heard that the Moravian King Belinder has declared war on the Bolsheviks?"

"The Moravian King Belinder? . . . No, I haven't heard that! On which front?"

"He's coming by sea, I'm told, with airplanes and airplanes and airplanes! And guns that float under the water and fire into the air; nobody can see them, but they are deadly to the enemy! He is due here, I'm told, within the week. And that will put an end to the Communists."

"Did you say 'under the water and into the air'? What do they shoot with, then? Won't the explosives get damp in the water?"

"The explosives, honoured sir, are not filled with powder. They shoot stinking gas. When you breathe it, you choke to death!"

"Where will we hide?"

"We'll get instructions to sit in our cellars until all the Bolshevik trash is exterminated."

A neighbour listened attentively, his eyebrows raised. Beside him stood a lady, pelican-like with the hanging paunch of a goitre. Her powdered nose projected sharply from beneath a velvet hat with a wet, bedraggled ostrich plume. Her pathetic mouth was open, catching the words of the conversation as avidly as a

turkey catches flies that buzz around his head.

Whispers of gossip swirled and mixed with clouds of incense and smoke of wax tapers and spread quickly to the ears of all the listeners.

"Do you know . . . ? Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . . Have you heard . . . ? Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . ."

"The Communists are deserting the ship like rats . . . Sh . . . sh . . ."

"Trotsky has cut Lenin to pieces with his own hands . . . with a meat chopper . . . So help me God! . . . Strike me dead if it isn't so . . . Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . . My nephew just returned from Moscow . . . yesterday . . . he saw it himself . . . Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . . He has a job in the Kremlin—in the Food Supply Department . . ."

"What's that? . . . What's that you're saying? . . . Is he a Communist?"

Explosions of hostile mockery struck the old woman. She rallied desperately:

"What are *you* saying! Holy Mother save and protect us! Don't you dare to call him a Communist! He's nothing of the kind! Surely you don't expect him to starve to death . . . Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . . So he got himself a job among those heathen. . . . May the roof tumble about their heads!"

"But have you heard that that Ignatyev is

dying like a dog? All day yesterday they brought one doctor after another to him. . . . His guts are sticking out of his belly, the damned sheeny! And it's all from drinking so much. . . . Let's hope he'll die long and horribly! Damn him! . . ."

"I heard that yesterday they shot eight hundred more at the Cheka. They arrested a thousand and shot eight hundred of them! Two hundred, I've heard, managed to buy themselves out. . . . Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . ."

"How much did they pay?"

"There were various prices, and different kinds of pay. . . . I've heard that some paid a hundred thousand. . . . Some paid with flour, some with gold. . . . These cannibals take any-think they can get their hands on!"

"They say that when they let Vanka Krasavin out, they took four Persian rugs, diamond ear-rings, and two hundred thousand in cash. . . . I mean that godson of Foma Ignatich, the church elder. . . ."

"Little Father! Nicholas the all-merciful! Holy Saints! When will we put an end to these murderers? . . . Oh, Queen of Heaven, save us, take pity on us!"

"... But do you know that King Maxillian

of Belinder is coming here under water and will shoot stinking gas out of guns? . . . Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . . shshsh . . .”

Like incense, gossip rose in clouds of lilac smoke, twisting its vaporous body over the city.

Gossip crawled away like snakes to the outskirts of the city, to the factories manned by grim workers.

Gossip crawled through the queues that had stood on guard since early morning waiting for bread in front of stores that had not yet opened. Bent and twisted like rotten black railroad ties, they formed compact rows: little old women with bundles, children with parental overcoats thrown over their heads, undernourished housewives, yellow and pinched by hunger, workmen . . . caps drawn over their faces, hands stuck into pockets, eyes dry and red like coals, glowing, glassy . . . mouths tightly shut.

Only an old woman broke the silence with her toothless muttering:

“Lord, oh, Lord, when will this accursed life come to an end? My little Vanya has been unable to get out of bed. He will die of scurvy!”

A workman snarled:

“H’m . . . listen to her . . . Shut up!”

"Shut up yourself! You're lucky! You get a half-pound every day! But I get it according to the second category, and that's only a quarter of a pound, and not every day. It all depends on your accursed decrees! And it's so full of straw that when you eat it, it scratches your mouth! Oh, Lord!"

"We've come to a pretty pass!" interrupted a man in a worn-out coat and a cap. "Things should be better, but I don't see how they can be. They've been 'freeing' us until the devils got us, these comrades of ours, the noble commissars! But it seems they won't last much longer now. . . . I've heard that General . . ."

"Shut up! . . . Satan! I'll shut you up!"

His cap was slouched down in front, his hands were stuck in his pockets, his eyes were dry and red, like coals.

But within the strong thick walls of the grey house with a sentry at the entrance, work went on as always. . . .

2

Zudin nervously ran his fingers through his chestnut hair, brushing it from side to side like sheaves of rye. He was frowning as he listened

to Katzmann. The latter, round-shouldered and curly-haired, slouched in his chair. Glasses were perched on the curve of his sprawling hooked nose; his tongue constantly licked the saliva that gathered on his lips.

“Yes, Alexey Ivanovich, our agents, Sokol and Zvonsky, who have done the outside shadowing, distinctly saw Mr. Hackey—yes, the very same Mr. Hackey—here in the street near the hotel. They followed him. He climbed over a fence into an alley and ran. They fired, but of course it was of no avail. There are all sorts of lanes and by-lanes around there, and anyway, it was getting dark. He was lost without a trace. They searched the entire yard. They discovered that when he climbed the fence he dropped an overshoe. It’s too bad that we haven’t a photograph of him to show to all our agents, because if we had, we’d catch him at once. Now the only hope is that he will accidentally run into Sokol again. I told him to hang around the hotel. That’s all there is about Hackey; for the time being he has given us the slip, but he’s around here.

“Now to continue: I keep on thinking that Pavlov ought to be removed. His former tricks in the case of Bocharkin were, after all, you re-

member, exceedingly suspicious. Now comes this business with the diamonds which he managed to get for himself from Fomin without my knowledge. He's trying to make out that the case is of no importance and obviously attempting to quash it. What we should do is clear: shadow Pavlov, and then, in case of any developments, clear him out to Dukhonin, to the staff . . ."

A crooked smile played over Katzmann's yellow, emaciated face. The tip of his sprawling hooked nose twitched nervously.

"Very well, Abram. Do as you think best," Zudin approved thoughtfully.

"There's something else, Alexey Ivanovich," Katzmann resumed in his guttural voice. He seemed confused, and he stared fixedly at his fingernails. "Apropos of Pavlov—it might not hurt to put someone else out of our domain. I don't know how it seems to you, but it strikes me that Lipshaevich is not much to my taste."

"Right, right," Zudin nodded. "I have meant to suggest that to you myself for some time."

"And then, you know, there is that . . . Valts?" said Katzmann very quickly, as if ashamed of himself, but looking Zudin straight in the eye.

"Valts? . . . I . . . don't think so." Zudin said this with a constrained smile, and flushed.

"You trust her too much. See that you are not mistaken," Katzmann insisted, dropping his eyes.

"Come, come, Abram! I know what you're thinking, and I assure you it's all nonsense. She may prance around about me, but it takes two to strike a bargain, and I don't happen to be flattered. So much for that. Besides, she's as grateful as a dog to me because I picked her up out of the gutter and gave her a job. Now, my dear fellow, she'll go through fire and water for us. Consider how many new threads she has discovered in the old, so-called 'finished' cases!"

Zudin smiled triumphantly. Katzmann pursed his lips.

"No, Abram. I vouch for Valts. You're prejudiced against her because she's a pretty little wench. Come, come!"

"You know best," Katzmann nodded, yielding to the arguments. "But . . ."

Fomin appeared in the doorway.

"How do you do, Alexey Ivanovich! How do you do, Abram Moiseich! I have come directly from Ignatyev. He was about to sum-

mon you, since it is inconvenient to speak on the telephone, when I happened to come along. And, my dear fellows, he presented me with one hell of a case. To-day a courier brought him a packet from Moscow. There they have discovered the threads leading to the 'fighting organization' of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, but the spools are right here in our territory! And under our 'wakeful eye,' ten versts along the Northern Railway in a villa at Osennikovo, this little band is living and prospering and getting ready for something or other. . . . Why are you startled? This is merely the introduction. The story is yet to come. . . . The robbery of the cashier of the People's Bank was their work. But the conspiracy, my dear friends, is thorough. Now, if we want to catch all of them, one, or certainly no more than two, of us must first carefully reconnoitre, examine all the exits, and then surprise them when they are in full quorum. . . . Here you are. . . . Read it for yourself!"

Smiling grimly, he sat down in an easy chair. Zudin and Katzmann raced through the report, punctuating it with exclamations.

"Whom shall we send? Who should go?" Zudin thought aloud, standing up, shoving his

hands into his pockets and looking at Fomin. . . . "How about Kulikov?"

"Do you know what?" Katzmann jumped to his feet. "Let me go myself!"

There was a moment of silence.

"Very well, then. If you want to, go ahead," said Zudin. "It's a sufficiently serious and interesting case. But take my advice, dear fellow, and take somebody along to help you. Let's say, Kulikov—or Dagnis. And be sure to place our detachments in ambush at the nearest railway points. Then we'll be certain of rounding them up."

"Quite right, quite right," Fomin agreed.

Katzmann's eyes shone. Excitement at the prospect of this important case gave him wings. He seemed to fly across the room as he paced the floor. "I'll take Dagnis with me. He is an experienced fellow."

3

In the little grey room Yelena Valentinovna pored over a case with persistent attention. She even rose and placed one knee on the chair. Her full, modest dress spread in soft folds and

chastely covered her neck and arms.

Petya Chotkin! Old friend! Are you here, too?

Surprise and amusement were in her smile. Petya Chotkin rose in her startled memory as a living being: an ungainly fellow with ears like burdock leaves, and the expression of a yoked cow, dressed in stylishly cut swallow-tails and low-cut waistcoat that revealed a crumpled shirt front; his hands were always moist.

Yes, that's the same one: Pyotr Ivanovich Chotkin, a merchant's son.

She recalled his lusty guffaws, the coarseness of his manner. In the upper circle of pre-Revolutionary gilded youth he was always welcome to its orgies as a shocking and intriguing factor. The principal justification for his acceptance was the fact that he was the only son of a millionaire jewellery merchant.

Pyotr Ivanovich Chotkin! Who did not know him?

Yelena remembered that on one occasion when he was a bit drunk he had filled her corsage to overflowing with gold ten-rouble pieces. She had greedily clutched to her warm flesh each handful of cold metal flung at her, while other revellers laughed: "Papa will pull Petya's

ears again! This is a pretty costly prank! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Yelena quickly reconstructed the case from the documents; he had already been in prison for three months. She whistled in surprise. *I can't imagine why he was arrested! What could he have done?*

One of his old acquaintances, an officer and an agent of Denikin, happened to have spent a night with him once, on the strength of their former boon companionship, and when arrested had divulged this fact. That was all. There was no other evidence of any kind. The investigation had long since been closed, and a note had even been added to the effect that that officer had been shot. The recommendation of the investigator was also given: to quash the case and free Chotkin. But there was no notation that this had been carried out, nor was there anything in the report to indicate that he had been released. So the matter stood. The investigator, a certain Verekhleyev, had been summarily called to Moscow on pressing business. The Chotkin case had been stuck into the file of "Finished Cases," and Petya remained in prison, forgotten by all.

Yelena sprang up and half ran, half walked

directly to Shalenko in the adjoining room.

"May I have the file of prisoners under arrest?"

There it was under the letter "C": "Chotkin, Pyotr Ivanovich, cell 45; investigator, Verekhleyev."

Returning to her room, Yelena chuckled as she recalled the lanky Chotkin.

Well, never mind, brother. In memory of old-time pranks, I must come to your rescue. To-morrow you'll be free. I'll take the case to Zudin immediately and get him to sign your release.

Again she chuckled merrily.

To-morrow you will be jumping around like a giraffe, to the joy of your doting mamma and papa!

Suddenly she sobered. She thought awhile, biting her lips and staring into space. She made a quick, decisive gesture. Then, unhurriedly, carefully, she placed the report under a pile of others and looked around apprehensively. No one was in sight. She breathed a sigh of relief, and went directly to Katzmann.

"Abram Moiseich, I don't feel at all well to-day. Please may I go home? If I feel better I'll come back toward evening. But now it's very

difficult for me to stay. May I go?"

Abram's thoughts were far from Yelena.

"All right, all right. . . . Go ahead."

Like a mischievous little girl who walks timidly under the eye of her governess, her head lowered piously to hide the impish look in her eyes, repressing the shouting joy within her—so did Yelena leave with exemplary sedateness, as if she were ill, walking cautiously down the steps until she reached the street. Over her head was the silken peace of the turquoise sky, translucent, cloudless, while below, the noises of bustling humanity were like the monotonous, disheartening coughing that resounds endlessly from the cell of a consumptive prisoner.

4

Yelena hurried, her head bent forward as she walked. She looked around furtively and stopped to read the newspapers pasted on the wall at the corner. She began to run. Her firm heels crushed the fragile crystals of ice and resounded on the layers of frozen muck.

She recognized the humped greyish stone house that had once belonged to the Chotkins.

Walking quickly up to the front entrance, she found it boarded up, the glass doors sealed. Then on a board in the dark side entrance she read: "I. P. Chotkin, Apt. 17." She made her way into the shaft-like courtyard, slipping over its icy paths. Her eyes raced over the numbers above the doors—13, 14, 15, 16, 17—*ah-ha!*

She climbed the stone staircase, supporting herself on the rough iron banister, passing doors with chalk marks on them, until she reached the third story. Odours compounded of refuse, kitchens, and cats assailed her. Before her was the door of Apartment 17. She cautiously tapped the door with the fist of the brass knocker. There was no response. She knocked again more insistently, evoking a rattling echo. Finally she heard rapid footsteps and the frightened question:

"Who's there?"

"I must see Ivan Petrovich Chotkin—on a very important personal matter."

"He's not at home. Ivan Petrovich has gone away."

She waited silently. The person on the other side of the door was evidently listening for the sound of her departing footsteps.

"What business have you with him?"

"I come from his son, from Pyotr Ivanovich," Yelena said, simulating the manner of her questioner. "I must see him—urgently. Don't be afraid. Can't you tell from the voice that it's a woman and not a bandit?"

The latch grated, the door swung back a bit on the chain, shut again, the end of the chain clattered, and only then was the door opened wide.

"Come in!"

A servant, a little old woman in a shawl, had opened the door. Another old woman, who wore a lace collar and who was somewhat more genteel in appearance, stood in an inner doorway and looked distrustfully at Yelena. She was measured from head to foot by the uneasy appraisal of the two old women.

"Ivan Petrovich went to Mass with his wife. . . . They always fast the fourth week of every month . . . not far from here—at the Church of the Trinity. They will soon return. Sit down, if you have come from Pyotr Ivanovich. They are worried to death about their son. It's no laughing matter when you think that he's been sitting there for more than three months. We go with his mother, Anna Zakharevna, every Wednesday and bring bread and curd-cakes to the poor

boy. He is very fond of curd-cakes—I mean Pyotr Ivanovich. And we don't know why the Almighty is punishing us," the little old woman in the shawl rambled on.

"And who may you be?" inquired the woman in the lace collar, edging nearer.

"I am an acquaintance of Pyotr Ivanovich. I have learned something very important that may be of help to him. But I must see his father, Ivan Petrovich."

"Has something happened?" the two old ladies exclaimed in one voice.

"No, no, no! Nothing has happened! On the contrary, I have found out that it is possible to release Pyotr Ivanovich very soon, and so I have come to consult about it."

"Well, the Lord be praised! . . . Please sit down. Ivan Petrovich should have returned from Mass long ago. Won't you please come into the dining-room? This way, please," invited the woman in the lace collar, courteously opening the door into the corridor and from there into the dining-room.

The dining-room was bleak, gloomy. The canvas blinds were pulled up, but a stone wall opposite the windows shut out the light. A canary bird fidgeted, and as it swung in the

cage, grains dropped occasionally to the window-sill. In the corner, under an ikon case of tinselled images, a lamp flickered through dim greenish glass. A wall clock of black oak swung its pendulum monotonously. On the dark oilcloth table-cover was food covered by a napkin. Against the walls massive oak chairs, like sentries, guarded a heavy, uncouth cupboard. On a service table, likewise of oak, lay a bag through which something was seeping.

It must be grapes, or prunes. It smells good.
Her eyes roamed about the room.

They seem to be very well off, although it is very depressing here and as dark as a store-room. I should never want to live like this.

She was startled by distant, indistinct voices. They came from the kitchen. Apparently the Chotkins had returned. In great excitement, the tall, wrinkled, grey, and unshaven Chotkin, looking like a porcupine in his fur overcoat, burst into the dining-room. He was followed by his wife, who waddled behind him like a duck, attempting to dash under his arm and precede him. They stopped short and looked in some confusion at Yelena.

"Have you come from our son?" they asked in alarm. "What's happened to him? You say they'll let him out?"

"He may be released. Yes. . . . I should like to talk to you about it, privately, if you care to."

A depressing silence fell. The glances of the old women turned to the leaden eyes of Ivan Petrovich, seeking in vain under his grave brows encouragement and protection against their loneliness.

"Well, if it is a secret——" he said in a tense, muffled voice. "Won't you please come with me into my study?"

He led her through the parlour, opening a door over which hung a piece of carpet.

"Please excuse me—we have no heat these days—all of us try to be as cosy as possible and find shelter in the dining-room, the bedroom, and the servants' quarters."

The large room looked out on the street. The blinds were not lowered. Dust lay over furniture covers, and pictures were hidden behind papers pasted together. The bare hardwood floor glistened coldly.

Complete disorder reigned in the study. Many pieces of furniture were piled one on top

of the other near the wall, and rolls of thick carpet stuck out beneath. In a tarnished gilded frame on the wall was a picture of the Magdalene pondering stupidly against the background of a gloomy grotto, her breasts hanging over a dull book, her halo as dull as a worn five-kopek piece. Under the Magdalene were boxes covered with coarse linen. On the floor nearby were traces of flour, and the faint odour of herring emanating from the boxes gave a clue to their contents.

A broad, heavy writing table covered with crimson cloth was laden with a massive writing stand decorated with little bears. The shaggy little beasts seemed petrified in their clumsiness and depressed by the weariness of the Magdalene's drooping breasts. Chotkin pushed a semicircular easy chair in a green cover toward Yelena and sat down in another chair made of smooth wood, with a broad bow-shaped carving instead of a back. He was silent, as if waiting for her to commit herself.

"You see, I am an old acquaintance of your son, Pyotr Ivanovich. . . . That is, we have met not infrequently before—at the homes of mutual friends. . . . I used to be an actress, and we met in the theatre," Yelena began in some

confusion. "In brief, I have known your son for a long time, and I wish him nothing but good."

The old man was still waiting with the patience of a cat. Her body contracted suddenly from the penetrating cold of the damp room.

"But now, you see, I have learned that he is in grave danger. I happen to have some very good friends in the Cheka, and they told me . . ."

Chotkin gazed eagerly at her slightly rouged, insouciant mouth.

"Don't be frightened, please—although your son is facing a very serious situation. You see, he is confronted with the alternatives of being either shot or set at liberty. His fate will be decided to-morrow, and it is in the hands of one man whom you can easily influence."

"Who is this man?"

"The chairman of the entire Cheka—Zudin himself."

Chotkin collapsed. His elbows slid off the table and he fell forward against his hands. His body shrank into the fur coat, as if he were a frightened snail. Only his shaven grey head remained in evidence. His protruding lower

lip quivered, and tears fell from his wet eyelids and rolled down his unshaven, prickly chin.

"What can I do about it?" he sobbed in a scarcely audible whisper.

"What a strange fellow you are indeed! I have described the situation very clearly: the fate of your son, thank God, is in your own hands; I managed *that*. You can certainly save him, and very easily, from being shot to-morrow. You merely need to provide yourself with something and give it to someone by noon to-morrow."

"With what must I provide myself?"

"Twenty pounds of gold."

The old man rose and his mouth dropped open loosely. Gasping, he leaned with both hands against the table, so as not to fall. He breathed hoarsely.

"Twenty pounds! . . . Twenty pounds! . . . Twenty pounds!" he whispered, as if crushed by her words. "Of gold? . . . Where shall I get it? . . . My God! That's quite impossible!"

"Your son has been thoroughly involved in a very insidious conspiracy. I have investigated all means of saving him, but there is no other way out. Of course, if you can't do anything

—do forgive me for disturbing you. Only don't hold it against me later. I have warned you."

And Yelena Valentinovna, haughtily turning up her nose, rose in an affected manner.

"Where are you going? Little Father, what is happening to-day!" Chotkin burst into hysterics, seized Yelena by her cloak, and would not let go of her hand. Then he collapsed, with his head on the table, and wept with noisy abandon.

"Petichka! My beloved little son! What's to be done? In Christ's name! In Christ's name! Petichka!"

On the threshold appeared his wife. She had already removed her fur cloak, and in her grey dress she looked like a fat little sparrow.

"Ivan Petrovich! What is the matter with you?" she cried, running to her husband.

Yelena Valentinovna regarded the scene with dispassionate *hauteur*.

"What has happened to Petichka?" the old woman exclaimed, bristling like a setting hen at Yelena, and clinging to her husband's fur coat.

"Anyuta! My darling! Petichka! . . . Our Petichka! . . . To-morrow . . . may be killed

... may be shot! ...” Chotkin howled, sobbing wildly.

Still clinging to her husband’s sleeve, the old woman fell to the floor and began to wail loudly.

Yelena tapped her foot on the floor. She was becoming annoyed.

“I don’t understand, really! I don’t understand at all: you are rich people. You used to have gold by the bushel. And now you wail, regretting the twenty pounds necessary to save your son. Good-bye!”

She angrily pulled her cloak out of the hands of the feeble old man.

“Wait! Wait! In Christ’s name!”

With a hoarse rattle in his throat, Chotkin limped after her. The old woman followed him, wailing, swaying, sodden with tears.

“Well, now, what’s the matter?” Yelena cried irritably, drawing herself up proudly in the middle of the room.

“But where are you running? Give us time to think . . . to come to our senses . . . to consider the matter!”

“Really, I have no time.” She pursed her full lips, and her heavy lashes veiled her eyes. “Besides, this is a secret matter, and I have no in-

tention of gossiping about it."

The old couple, supporting each other and weeping, dragged her back to the study, where the Magdalene brooded above the herring.

"Can't it really be done for less?" said Ivan Petrovich, turning his tearful pleading eyes to Yelena. "They're asking twenty pounds of gold by to-morrow, Anyuta," he explained to his wife in a stifled voice.

The latter, wiping her wet eyelids and nose with a handkerchief, sobbed nervously, and turned pleading eyes on Yelena, awaiting the reply.

"You're a queer fellow, really, Ivan Petrovich. You act as if you were behind a counter. Do you think people bargain about such things? If someone does you a favour and offers to save the life of your son, you should thank God that they don't ask for a *bushel* of gold!"

"If it weren't all at once! Where can I get so much?" And he flung his arms out in a gesture of helplessness.

"By noon to-morrow, you must have all of it ready—the full amount," Yelena announced crisply.

"Ivan Petrovich!" the old woman cackled

pathetically. "You will have to take all my rings, and bracelets, and medallions, and your watch and chain! Our son is worth more than all of these!" And again she quivered in a paroxysm of weeping.

"That won't be enough, old woman," mumbled Chotkin, his brows knit in thought. "I wonder if we could borrow from our friends? But what's the use of asking them! They won't give it! For God's sake, make it less!"

"I have already told you that there is no question of bargaining."

"Whom are we to pay? And suppose they fool us?"

"Don't worry. It will all be arranged. I shall see to it that everything will come out all right for you."

But how am I going to manage it? Why didn't I think about that before?

"You get the gold ready by to-morrow noon," she drawled. "And at that time we shall release Pyotr Ivanovich, and everybody will be satisfied."

"That means we are to pay as soon as he is released?" Chotkin suggested.

"No. Why when he is released?" Yelena corrected him. "We will prepare an order in

the Cheka for his release, and upon presentation of this order, you will pay . . .” she rattled on, choking over her words, “. . . and when they see the order, they will release your son.”

“Do you know, madame, or mademoiselle . . . Excuse me, I am an old man . . .” Chotkin sniffed quickly. “I am not good at such matters. But I have here—he lives in this very house—an old friend of mine, the lawyer Vunsh. Don’t be afraid!” He lurched toward Yelena, noticing her gesture of protest. “I’ve never had any secrets from him. Everything is above board. And, believe me, he is as silent as the grave—a thoroughly trustworthy person. With your permission I shall consult him, and return immediately.”

The old man, burdened with grief, shuffled out of the room hastily, as if afraid that Yelena might change her mind and go away before he could return.

5

Anna Zakharevna, wiping away her tears, cast the beclouded, senseless glance of a jackdaw at Yelena, who sat thoughtful and uneasy and plucked at the fur of her cloak. From the

dining-room in the distance the canary twittered, stirring in Yelena memories of spring-time, its fresh green leaves and perennially new sounds.

And she was annoyed that, for some strange reason, luscious thoughts about little birds and swelling buds should creep into her head at this hour, among the dusty rubbish in this chilly sepulchre of a study, in the midst of unpleasant business negotiations.

But why shouldn't I? Why not? . . . How much sunshine and happiness I can buy for myself with this miserable gold! . . .

These thoughts startled her. Her heart leapt with joy.

Only I must see this thing through to the end!

She spurred her dreams with this thought.

Somewhere in the distance was the creaking sound of doors opening and closing. Hasty muffled steps mingled with the excited conversation of someone approaching. The creaking sounds came nearer and nearer. The canary, startled, fluttered in his cage. The footsteps passed quickly through the parlour. One walked slowly, softly, heavily; this was the master of the house. The shoes of the other

clicked rapidly over the hardwood floor. The carpet over the doorway was lifted, and behind the heavy figure of the master of the house Yelena saw a shrivelled little man with a close-shaven head, gold-rimmed spectacles, and with the beady grey eyes and pinched narrow face of a rodent.

"Vunsh," he said, bowing and scraping his little feet. "Ivan Petrovich has told me," he continued. He cast a respectful glance at the stooping Chotkin, but it seemed as if he had waved a grey dusty rag at him instead. "However, what is the concrete proposal that you have to make concerning his son?" he asked, again glancing as if waving a dusty rag.

"Their son, Pyotr Ivanovich, is now in the Cheka prison," Yelena began calmly. "Tomorrow he will be shot——"

The old woman caught her breath spasmodically, and tears again appeared in her eyes. Chotkin coughed and sank deeper into his fur coat.

"—That is, he will be shot unless these people rescue him," Yelena corrected herself. "And it will be easy to rescue him. It is only necessary to fix . . . one of the important ones . . . and on the very next day, Pyotr Ivanovich

Chotkin will be at liberty."

Vunsh sat in the chair he had drawn up, drumming his fingers on his knees, his mouse-like eyes darting in every direction.

"How much did you say is needed?"

"Twenty pounds of gold, in goods or in coin," she answered indifferently.

"Oh-ho!" muttered the alert Vunsh, casting the same dusty glance at the stooping Chotkins through his spectacles. But immediately he turned to Yelena with old-fashioned gallantry:

"Forgive me. . . . Such affairs—you can understand it yourself—demand care and circumspection. Who are you? Will you permit me to look at your documents? . . . Your proposal is too important to warrant hasty decisions, and a businesslike negotiation, as you can understand yourself, demands businesslike methods."

His little eyes were lost in the gleam of his eye-glasses.

Yelena flushed deeply, curled her upper lip in contempt, and pulling her documents out of the inner pocket of her cloak, handed them to Vunsh.

"I work in the local Cheka. I am secretary to the chairman." Her brown eyes were drowned in a wave of shame under her lowered

eyelashes. "I hope that you are now convinced—that you understand the difficulty and delicacy of this situation. You wouldn't expect the chairman himself to come here!" she drawled haughtily.

"Oh, yes, indeed. We understand!" Vunsh interrupted her, respectful and confused, hastily returning the papers of identification that bore her photograph.

"What shall we do?" Vunsh inquired, turning to Chotkin.

"I don't know," the latter answered in a dead voice. "You know yourself that I haven't so much available."

"When must you have it?" Vunsh asked, again addressing himself to Yelena.

"To-morrow at noon. You must give me the whole amount. And after that, toward evening, Pyotr Chotkin will be set at liberty. If you don't do that, it will not be possible to save him. You will never see him again. The point is," she defended herself in embarrassment, "he was so deeply involved that he is to be summarily executed. And if I, as a good old friend of Pyotr Ivanovich, had not been so fortunate as to persuade the right person,"—her eyes flickered slyly at Vunsh—"it would scarcely

be possible to free him for the consideration I have named."

"Excuse me, but where is the guarantee that you will set him at liberty after receiving the gold?"

"Permit me to ask you—what fool would try to save him from certain death without making sure of getting what he was promised?" Yelena retorted, pouting.

"But, excuse me," Vunsh pointed out, his eye-glasses shining. "You would still be able to re-arrest him in case our part of the agreement were not carried out. You risk nothing. He, as well as all of us, is in your hands!"

He swayed in his chair, and did not take his eyes from Yelena, whose face was scarlet.

"You have the wrong idea about the Cheka!" she said, slowly drawing out her words, trying to cover her confusion and eagerly grasping at a thousand threads of thought in an effort to escape the noose that Vunsh had cast about her. "The chairman cannot permit himself to indulge in caprices. He cannot release a man to-day and arrest him again to-morrow. If he did, sooner or later he would have to explain to the Collegium, which might not always approve, or ... it would be necessary to demand five times

as much gold as is asked now," she finished quickly and merrily, overjoyed by her own perspicacity, and triumphantly measuring Vunsh with the glance of a conqueror. "And, anyway, I don't understand the point of all this conversation. My offer is clear and definite. If you cannot, or do not wish to, accept it,"—turning toward Chotkin, she moved as though to rise from the chair—"the only thing left for me to do is to go."

Anna Zakharevna's mouth opened helplessly, and she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Chotkin, making an effort to hold up his loose lower lip, trembled in a paroxysm of despair, reflected in his eyes that turned appealingly from Yelena to Vunsh. The latter cleared his throat and again bowed respectfully, lowering his head with affected suavity.

"Don't say that! Don't say that! What do you mean? We agree! We shall try to gather together what is needed, but we beg of you most respectfully to extend the time limit a little, in case we might not be able to get it all, or a small trifle might be lacking. Ivan Petrovich does not possess as much wealth as you think. The valuables he owned were in safes, and were confiscated. He and his wife will be

obliged to call on their various friends and beg from each one whatever he can give of what has remained of his former possessions." His eye-glasses lowered deferentially toward Chotkin, while he nodded his close-shaven head with each word. "I hope that you will not be too exacting." At this point Yelena narrowed her eyes. "And besides, where and when shall we hand you the gold? This procedure is not at all devoid of hazard and may lead to serious consequences for you as well as for us."

"This is what we shall do," said Yelena, thinking aloud. "You will get the gold ready, and to-morrow I shall come for it, bringing a duplicate of the signed order for the release of Pyotr Ivanovich, which you will keep as proof and guarantee that our part of the bargain will also be carried out. The same evening, and certainly not later than midnight, Pyotr Ivanovich, set free, will return to the bosom of his family."

"Good!" twittered Vunsh.

"Good!" Chotkin muttered.

"Good!" Anna Zakharevna soundlessly moved her lips.

"And so, good-bye until to-morrow—until twelve o'clock." Yelena rose in a businesslike

way. "Only, if you please, bear in mind one important condition: not a word about this to Pyotr Ivanovich after his liberation, and not a word about it to anyone else."

"What are you saying! You may be sure of that!" Vunsh protested, bowing and scraping ceremoniously.

Yelena shook hands with everyone and went out, the silk of her skirt rustling softly as she passed through the amber dusk of the bleak rooms. A stifled ray of sunshine touched her luminous hair. She seemed a being apart and splendid in the sad apartment that was like a museum of oddities. Near her hovered the chattering, shrivelled little Vunsh, and behind him the ancient Chotkins swayed sorrowfully.

She passed through the parlour where everything was swaddled in linen covers, through the dining-room with its imprisoned bird, and the flickering ikon lamp in the corner before the holy images. She heard the clattering of pans in the kitchen, the door of which was kept ajar by a log of wood, and . . . the torture was over. She ran down the staircase, through the yard, and only after she had gone some distance along the street did she realize the full joy of her liberation from the intrigue into

which her own cupidity had drawn her. Slowing her steps and eagerly inhaling the fresh air, she breathed a sigh of relief and exclaimed audibly: "Whew!"

6

All night she could not sleep. Something inexplicable pounded in her subconscious with harsh monotony, and it was difficult to smother this pain under a multitude of trifles connected with everyday affairs. She fell asleep toward dawn and awakened on a cloudy morning, irritated and confused. She had a vague feeling that some tremendous, maleficent power beyond her comprehension was crushing her ruthlessly, relentlessly. But by force of will everything instantly became clear. The nightmare fears subsided, and her mind became possessed with one idea: *I must go through with this quickly!*

Afterward she could not remember how she managed to get to the office, walk up to the files, and pull out the memorable case. At that moment she exulted that all of this was not a dream, that it was a fierce reality with life at

its apex, that the case in question had not inexplicably vanished, that all that was necessary now was to make one final effort—and Chotkin would be set at liberty, and she, Yelena, would receive gold, much gold—a new lease on life, a relief from the unendurable drabness about her. Under the skin of her back she felt feverishly cold, but her shoulders were burning hot, when, the portfolio containing the case under her arm, she knocked timidly on Zudin's door.

"May I come in?"

Zudin sat at the table, obviously worried and distracted. Blue circles were around his eyes, sunken from sleeplessness and profound fatigue. His brows were knitted, his mouth set in hard lines.

"I have come with a very curious case, Alexey Ivanovich. Good morning!"

"How do you do?"

"Here is a finished case, the case of Chotkin. It was recommended for dismissal, but—Chotkin is still sitting in prison."

"What do you mean 'sitting in prison'?" Zudin asked, but his question was uttered absent-mindedly. His thoughts were far away.

"There is a decision by the investigator, Verkhleyev, to set him at liberty—and there is an instruction to dismiss the case. It has even come to my files of finished cases, and yet the accused is still in prison, and has been there for three months."

"That's a fine state of affairs," Zudin mumbled. "Very well. Leave it here, and I'll examine it."

He brushed his hair back with aching fingers and looked in a stupor of weariness at the portfolio that lay before him.

A cold shiver ran over Yelena. She tapped the rug with her little slipper.

"It will require a moment of your attention, Alexey Ivanovich. Perhaps you can look at it right away. The case has already been decided on, and you must have read it, only you forgot to add your decision. It's a pity that this man has been in prison for so long for no good reason."

What a caressing, sincere, gracious voice! Yelena was amazed, wondering who was speaking in her voice. Her eyes were tender beneath her fringed eyelashes.

"How pretty she is!" Zudin thought. He tore himself from his work unwillingly and

turned to Yelena, who was now at his side.

"Here it is," she said, placing the folio directly in front of him.

Her polished rosy fingernail, like a fragile piece of porcelain, illuminated the dull faded sheet as she pointed to the lines.

Indeed, here it is: "I recommend that he be released. Investigator Verekhleyev."

Zudin sighed wearily, dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote in the upper corner of the sheet: "Case Dismissed."

"What is his name?"

"Chotkin."

Of course! Chotkin. Here it is right before my eyes!

"... Chotkin is to be released. Zudin."

But why is Yelena so insistent? He glanced at her searchingly as her eyes greedily followed the movement of his tired hand. He re-read the short case from beginning to end, carefully examining signatures, remarks and dates, but he failed to discover any irregularities.

The case is genuine. . . . There is no cause for uneasiness. Chotkin is still in prison because of accidental forgetfulness. Yelena is right. But . . . I am tired now. Perhaps I ought to postpone its consideration until another time.

Should I decide now?

He wavered, sagging wearily in his chair.

Gorst appeared suddenly in the doorway, over-wrought and tense.

"Alexey Ivanovich!" His hands trembled. His blue eyes blinked excitedly. "Katzmann has been killed! . . . Dagnis is wounded! . . . But Katzmann has been killed! They will be brought here directly!"

"Killed! What do you mean?"

Everything swung in circles before Zudin. He sprang to his feet like a wounded beast. Lightnings of burning corrosive thoughts stormed like a hurricane in his eyes. He flung the portfolio into a corner, knocking over a bottle that rang out like a signal, and rushed at Gorst.

"What do you mean? Katzmann killed? Where? How? When?"

"I've just received a telephone call from Kuntsevich, commander of the detachment, who called me directly from the railroad station. Katzmann was killed this morning in an exchange of shots with the Socialist-Revolutionaries at Osennikovo. Dagnis was wounded. One of the Socialist-Revolutionaries was killed. The remainder have made their escape

for the time being. We have surrounded the entire district."

"The filthy bastards!" Zudin spat out, choking with anger. "The scoundrels! Oh, I can't keep my hands off these Judases, this scum of the earth! Katzmann . . . killed! Abram is gone! They've killed him!" Zudin suppressed a sob and caught his breath in an agony of grief. "He never spared himself, he always risked too much! He exposed himself when he shouldn't have!" he groaned to himself. "Oh Gorst, what a pity, what a pity we have lost Katzmann! Abram is dead!"

Gorst was silent, biting his lips, and avoided watching Zudin, who paced up and down the room in wild excitement.

"Just wait! I'll give it to them! I'll go at once to Osennikovo, and you write a telegram to Moscow with a copy to the Central Committee and I'll sign it. Do it at once! And please get Ignatyev for me on the telephone. . . . Where is Fomin? . . . Give me immediately a list of all people under arrest. We'll finish off a hundred of them as a memorial for the dead! Poor Abram! . . . Well, wait, you'll find out, you devils, what happens when you kill the leaders of the working class! . . . Here are some

of the cases!" Zudin angrily flung a package of reports off the table. "Don't spare any of that scum! We shall answer terror with terror! To avenge one individual we shall strike at their whole class!"

Yelena felt a chill in her heart. The murder of Katzmann and the sudden outburst of wild anger that possessed Zudin appalled her. Moreover, in the midst of the general pile of papers that had been fiercely thrown from the table was the portfolio containing the case of the innocent Chotkin. *Will everything be lost because of a stupid accident . . . now that I am so near the goal?*

Yelena shuddered.

Zudin, huge and terrible, rushed out of the door as if he were caught in a swirling column of flame. Gorst was silent, depressed. He bent over and with clumsy fingers picked up the papers and portfolios that had scattered all over the room.

"One of these is mine," said Yelena, stretching her hand toward the familiar cover.

"He said that no one was to be spared."

"Yes, I know. But he has already written his decision on this one—this is an old case. After all, because of some accident you cannot kill

people who have already been acquitted and who are guilty of nothing!"

She snatched the portfolio decisively from the hands of the angry Gorst and went out.

Now I must hurry. I hope that nothing else will happen to interfere. She ran straight to Shalenko.

"Konstantin Konstantinich, my dear boy, please write me an order right away. Here is Zudin's decision! Only please make a carbon copy. The old mother of the prisoner is waiting downstairs and I want to make her happy by showing her the copy."

"Why a copy? Whoever heard of such a thing! He'll be released, and that's that."

"But what difference does it make to you? Why are you so stingy with paper? . . . How unfeeling you are! I asked Alexey Ivanovich and he gave his permission. . . ." She blushed because she had lied so glibly, and her excitement grew.

"Well, all right, all right." Shalenko nodded. "I'll do it, I'll do it. Wait a minute. Only, you shouldn't pity these people, Yelena Valentinovna. Here they've killed Abram Moiseich. How sorry I am for the poor fellow! He was a good and honest man. He was always dream-

ing of moving his family here from Orsha. And how he worked! . . .”

But Yelena did not listen. She waited on pins and needles.

Hurry! Hurry! It will soon be one o'clock!

At last everything was ready. She stumbled and almost fell as she ran breathlessly past shuttered and boarded-up windows, glass shattered by bullets, and rusty iron signs dangling over clothing stores with empty windows like the eye sockets of bleached skulls.

7

The house was like a crow covered with ashes, standing in the desolate silence of the once fashionable street, now forsaken, along which its abandoned survivors crept furtively. She quickly entered the gate and mounted the wet, slippery staircase to the third floor.

She was met by Chotkin himself, who blinked, his eyes bristling with questions:

“Well? What? How?”

“Everything is ready. Here is the order, and here is the duplicate for you. This evening he will be liberated. But tell him to go away from

here quickly—anywhere—to a village. You can never tell what may happen!”

The old woman crossed herself piously.

Only now did Yelena notice the sunken cheeks of Ivan Petrovich, exhausted after a sleepless night, and Vunsh's alert eyes.

With trembling hands, old man Chotkin brought a small linen sack out of the bedroom and placed it on the table before Yelena.

“Here is almost nineteen. Weigh it.” He had brought a pair of scales from the kitchen. “Believe me, I could not collect any more. As it was, my wife and I spent the whole night on our knees before our friends. It is difficult for people to understand one another's sorrow! Oh, how hard it has been! Here we have gathered together seven grams less than nineteen pounds. Both of us have worn off our knees! But to make up the difference there is more than three pounds of seventy-two-carat gold.”

The old woman's eyes were red-rimmed; tears rolled down her wrinkled nose.

“Have pity on us, in Christ's name!” she sobbed. “Have pity on us!”

Yelena frowned.

I wonder how I can get done with this as

quickly as possible? . . . What a stupid rôle to play!

Thin strands of her bright chestnut hair had fallen over her eyes. She brushed them away and hurriedly spread the ringing gold over the table.

My God! What riches! Bracelets! Rings! Watches! Medallions! Chains! And rolling circles of coins that seem alive! Oh, how many coins! Her dreams flared anew at sight of the gold.

"Very well. He who is to receive these things from me will examine them. But, as far as the deficiency in weight is concerned, you will have to make that up as soon as possible, without fail, and within the next few days. Otherwise, he would hardly consent. And if any part of the gold is of poor quality, you will be obliged to replace it. An agreement is worth more than money . . ."

And with more haste than ever, her disobedient fingers dancing with joy, she avidly gathered the gold into the sack, tied it with a string, and put it under her cloak.

"My, how heavy it is!"

She carelessly left the duplicate of the order on the table, merely indicating it with a glance.

Vunsh watched her intently, then examined the imprint of the rubber stamp against the light. She freed herself from the swarm of questions:

"When will they release Petichka?"

"Won't they deceive us?"

"Is Petichka alive?"

"Is he well?"

"At what time will he come?"

"He will be with you to-day!"

She left abruptly, walked hastily along the street, stepping with care so as not to fall. The little sack was under her cloak. She disappeared around the corner.

8

Passers-by met on the street. They looked significantly into one another's eyes and glanced around.

"Have you heard the news? To-day, at a villa in Osennikovo, someone killed an important sheeny from the Cheka!"

"You don't say!"

"Yes, yes, yes. . . . That's the latest news. . . . And have you heard? . . . King Belinder

of Moravia is coming here . . . under water!
. . . Haven't you heard? . . . Haven't you
really? . . . It's true! . . . A week from now
the Bolsheviks will be wiped out! . . . I have it
from reliable sources."

PART III

ONE of the small panes of the casement window in Zudin's office was open. The clatter of passing droshkies mingled with the dripping of water in a drain-pipe. The walls of the room, which had not been heated for a long time, were lightly coated with blue mould, which infected the air with a cold and musty dampness, in sharp contrast with the warm and sunny freshness of the spring morning that blew through the casement.

Sullen and unshaven, Zudin sat at his table like a trapped animal, gnawing at a pencil.

I'm tired of this vile baiting! I won't stand for it any longer!

He brought his fist down on the table with all his might. The inkstand rattled and the penholders rolled to the floor. With his bruised fist he threatened someone in the corner, although there was no one else in the room.

The case was clear: Fomin was intriguing against him. Moreover, he was reporting the

results of the intrigue to Ignatyev. Zudin could not help feeling that thousands of his comrades in the party committee were looking askance at him and finding fault with him. *Well, I'll show them! I'll bring it all out into the light of day!*

"Pull yourself together, Alexey!" he admonished himself in a cracked voice. "Pull yourself together and show them that you are superior to them all!"

He felt easier after he had said this. He rose and, with greater calm, began to pace the dusty, dirty rug from corner to corner.

How slyly they carry on their campaign, the scoundrels! To my face, these hypocritical "comrades" behave with brotherly solicitude; behind my back they indulge in endless nastiness and trickery! Is it possible that the habit of enmity, of mean competition and crafty, petty careerism which governed the life of the old, rotten social order and against which I have always fought . . . He even raised his clenched fists. . . . Is it possible that this accursed habit is so strong that it corrodes the most sacred, the most precious thing that has ever existed for me—the Party?

He smiled grimly, bitterly.

He remembered how once in exile he had

lain exhausted with fever in a Buryat village, moaning for some hot tea. A comrade, the shrivelled, quarrelsome Sokov, had flatly refused to warm his teapot. He had been compelled to rise, his teeth chattering, and stagger out into the frost several times to fetch firewood from the edge of the forest. His swimming brain clung to the hope that the water in the teapot would soon boil. But suddenly it seemed that Sokov had taken advantage of his trips for firewood and had drunk all his tea. He had been hurt and bitter, especially later, when Sokov, laughing derisively, bragged about it and taunted Zudin with being a flunkey and a lout.

But this had happened during the years of destruction, when the bonds of their common cause and common hopes were being eaten away by the rust of defeat. Now, when they had won so miraculously, and had passed so suddenly, unexpectedly, and easily through the hallway of national revolution to the tremendous chambers of world revolution, where now was the former comradely union, the brotherly self-sacrifice, the honest sincerity of one man to another? Yet now they were surrounded by immeasurably more enemies, and these enemies

had become more powerful, more cunning, more bloodthirsty. He, the chairman of the all-mighty Cheka of a large city, had to regard himself at times as a pathetic grasshopper who had impudently crawled up to the slender tip of a very tall fir tree, from which at any time he might be blown by the sharp, icy wind of infuriated Capitalism. Here, if anywhere, all of them should support one another more than ever, all should be as one! But were they? . . . Envy, fawning, communistic hypocrisy, revolutionary philistinism! Take, for example, Fomin, that red-headed fox!

Anger boiled and seethed within Zudin, oppressing his chest.

"Enough!" he burst out, clenching his fists. "Enough! I'll put an end to all of this!"

There was a timid knock on the door, and Lipshaevich entered.

"May I see you for a minute, Alexey Ivanovich? I want to talk to you about something." He looked around with frightened, twitching eyes. "I must warn you," he continued, coming closer, almost touching Zudin's face as he whispered in his ear. "They're brewing something against you! It seems that they have decided to put an end to you. . . . God knows that I wish

you nothing but good. . . . Without you we are lost! Beware of Fomin! . . . He is starting something. Last night Pavlov and Valts were arrested! . . .”

Zudin was shocked. He had no faith in Lipshaevich. He detested his impudent oily eyes, the eyes of a lackey, an attendant. And he disliked his revolting manner of informer for a gang of thieves.

Nevertheless he had to admit that Pavlov was at least culpable, and that he should have swept him out of the Cheka long ago. And yet Lipshaevich's words threw him again into a nervous fever.

Why were they arrested? Why? And, what was more important, why were they arrested without Zudin's knowledge? Did that mean that they trusted him no more? Excellent! The last drop of patience had spilled from the cup of his anger! After such information, it was no longer endurable to play hide-and-seek.

“Excellent! Excellent!” he roared, rubbing his hands, shivering not only from the inner nervous chill but also from the fresh breeze that blew through the open window. “I don't understand why you are so alarmed.” He addressed Lipshaevich with contempt. “I am not afraid

of intrigues. My conscience is clear and calm." Controlled and scornful, he watched the bewildered Lipshaevich shrug his shoulders and slink out quietly.

Then he seized the telephone and called Ignatyev.

"I must discuss a very important affair with you. May I come to you at once?"

"Good! You've called just in the nick of time! I shall expect you."

"Splendid!"

He sighed, aware of increasing steadiness and an inner pride in his own probity. He ordered the car, took out a piece of clean paper, smoothed it, and wrote a telegram:

To the chairman of the All-Union Cheka, Moscow.
Copy to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. *Urgent. Secret.*

I request to be replaced immediately. I cannot work efficiently in the midst of intrigues.

ZUDIN.

Then he folded the telegram, placed it in the side pocket of his coat, and walked out with assurance.

On the street he suddenly became aware of the ominous muffled roar of cannon far in the distance. Passers-by stopped timidly. They listened in apprehension and whispered together.

Workmen trampled the wet snow as they passed in small groups, frowning and brandishing rifles. A swarm of sailors ran across the street and scattered on all sides. A long grey mass of soldiers wavered and crept toward the bridge in the distance.

Reserves have arrived! I should discuss this matter with the chief of the Special Department.

And then it occurred to him that this was no longer any of his business, that he had been senselessly cut off, isolated. He, Zudin, was a nobody now.

On every corner, black groups of people stuck to the wall newspapers like cockroaches to a piece of bread.

Yes, the White Guards are near! They are on the outskirts of the city!

Splashing the mud, the automobile stopped before the broad entrance to the headquarters

of the Executive Committee, a huge, yellow building with columns. Zudin quietly mounted the broad marble staircase with its faded flags and portraits of Communist leaders. He passed the sentries, walked along a corridor, through the vestibule and secretary's room, straight to the doors of Ignatyev's office.

A secretary dashed up to him.

"Just a minute. I shall announce you at once."

He disappeared behind a door, which he closed in Zudin's face.

He was stung by this unusual reception. His apparently stilled anger rose again, not only against Fomin, but also against Ignatyev, and against everyone who no longer treated him with the confidence and simplicity of former days.

The secretary returned.

"You may come in."

Ignatyev sprawled as usual in his chair near the table, and at a distance, on a black leather sofa, sat a short man in a leather coat, Comrade Shustry. He looked intently at Zudin, appraising him.

"When did you come from Moscow?" Zudin greeted him.

"The other day."

"Well, how are things there?"

"All right."

The conversation lagged. Zudin did not mind; he had not come just to talk, but with a different purpose. Ignatyev rested his chin good-naturedly on his plump hands, and made no effort to get rid of Shustry. Perhaps it was his way of avoiding explanations of Fomin's recent behaviour. But Zudin would not permit this to stop him. Never! He was sick and tired of subterfuge. His mind was made up. He sank angrily into the chair in front of the table.

"I came here, Comrade Ignatyev," he said in a voice that was dry and purposely loud, so that Shustry might also hear—"I came here to inform you that I am leaving my post." And he reached for the telegram in his pocket.

"We know that," said Ignatyev calmly.

We know! We? Zudin strove frantically to comprehend the situation, his eyes passing from one to the other.

"So much the better. Since my comrades have been so astute in their benevolent provocation, and have laid their plans so carefully that they could tell beforehand its results, I suppose I should feel uniquely honoured." He

smiled caustically. "I am immediately telegraphing my resignation to the All-Union Cheka, and I am appealing to the Organization Bureau. Let them decide what's what."

"The Organization Bureau is also already acquainted with the case, Comrade Zudin," trilled Ignatyev's dry little voice. "And, by the way, here is Comrade Shustry, whom the bureau has sent to investigate it."

Shustry, delighted with the impression he was creating, stretched forth his credentials.

"Yes, indeed," continued Ignatyev. "Under the signatures of very important officials and armed with extraordinary powers, Shustry has been ordered here to investigate the case of Zudin."

Zudin twitched nervously. A wave of devastating panic swept over him. His enemies, then, had not been asleep on the job, and were not trifling. They were so thoroughly in earnest that they had even succeeded in concocting behind his back something which they were pleased to call a "case." Any naïve simpleton who believed in the brotherly honesty of all party comrades deserved this! War was war even here!

Something deeply rooted by habit, some-

thing established long ago in Zudin's view of life, unexpectedly tottered and collapsed with a roar of finality—as if an ancient scaffolding prepared for a building that had never been begun had fallen suddenly, and there remained only a pile of grey splinters and a cloud of dust—the shadow of sheer pride.

"I am ready," he said haughtily to Shustry. "But I must warn you in advance that right now, without my knowledge, the Cheka is being broken up. Last night two of my co-workers were arrested. Fomin did not even try——"

"Fomin had nothing to do with it. Your co-workers were arrested by me," Shustry countered boldly. "Where can we find a private room, Comrade Ignatyev? We want to talk quite frankly, as it were," Shustry tittered.

"There are plenty of rooms here," replied Ignatyev, pressing a button. "The secretary will take you."

"Look here," Shustry said abruptly, addressing Zudin but still looking at Ignatyev—"let me see your revolver." And when he received the Browning from Zudin, he put it directly in his own pocket. "Have you no other?"

"No."

They started toward the door. Then Shustry suddenly ran back to Ignatyev and whispered something hurriedly in his ear. The latter nodded. Zudin frowned. *How vile this all is! What a pathetic conspiracy against me! And how insidiously they have managed to prepare everything in the Central Committee and the All-Union Cheka! Well, well, Ignatyev. But wait, my friends. Just lay your cards on the table! We'll have a show-down.*

They went to an empty room on the third floor. A table and three chairs were all its furniture. Through the windows that faced the river could be seen the houses of the river suburb and the watch tower, smeared with sunlight.

Shustry opened the door himself, and immediately, with a deliberate display of foresight, locked it with the key that had been given him, sat down at the table, and pulled a pile of papers from his brief case. He pretended to be digging in them with great concentration, importantly knitting his shiny black brows until they looked like commas. With the shifting black dots of his eyes, they emphasized the yellowness of his face and the silver of his round,

closely-cropped head and grey military moustache.

"The Central Committee has received a case," Shustry began stealthily, like a cat stalking its prey, his eyes running over the table, over the papers, and even over Zudin's sleeves, but afraid to go higher to meet his excited gaze—"the Central Committee has received a case concerning you. I'm quite sure that you can guess the substance of this case."

"I am not a guesser of dirty gossip."

"Well, we shall find out immediately whether it is gossip or something else. Yes, we shall find that out immediately," Shustry twittered. He seemed to be jeering at Zudin. "Now tell me, please, Comrade Zudin..."—the word "comrade" sounded so false and so deliberately insulting that Zudin felt as if a cold toad had been placed in his outstretched hand. He sensed all this poignantly, and within him pulsed a fever of indignation like the alarm beat of a drum—"Now tell me, please, Comrade Zudin, how much, when, and from whom did you accept bribes?"

If someone had unexpectedly fired into Zudin's face, the shock would have been less than that produced by this question. All the

veins of his face stood out. His nostrils dilated. His eyes blazed with hatred and contempt. But his teeth bit quickly into his lips and with a superhuman effort he controlled the violent twitching of his body.

"Well, how about it, Comrade Zudin?" Shustry continued to deride him good-naturedly. "Do you wish to give a direct answer? Or do you want to think it over first?"

"I regard your question as a shameful, unwarranted attempt to insult me!" The words strained through his teeth in a hollow voice that did not seem his own.

"Oh, I see, I see," Shustry laughed indulgently. "I had utterly forgotten that you are an experienced hand at this game! You're quite right. What fool would take bribes directly, when for that purpose now exists the institution of secretaries, particularly women secretaries. It is a very convenient institution. A beauteous maiden, so to speak, gathers the papers together and slips something underneath. All is done quite respectably. And she may also be used on occasions as a bedroom convenience. But above all, this is a most happy arrangement for getting things into your pockets through her. Isn't that so, Comrade Zudin?"

He laughed as his eyes danced over Zudin, who sat as if petrified.

"I have no women secretaries. Furthermore, I do not understand what you are hinting at. If you have any concrete facts concerning my actions, will you please be so kind as to state them? That would be much better than playing riddles," Zudin replied quietly. The thought persisted that this was all some mad, bewildering nightmare.

"Oh, so that's it! Not caught, therefore not a thief? Well, as you like. We shall follow another course," Shustry continued to meditate aloud with as much composure as ever, as if he were quite alone and muttering to himself, but all the while hugely enjoying his rôle. "You are not a child, you know, and you are not a novice in the party. Therefore you can thoroughly understand, of course, that the absence of complete repentance and confession characterizes your crime somewhat differently, and will place you in quite a different light in the eyes of the Central Committee. In other words, I have not been mistaken."

"What has the Central Committee to do with this?" Zudin roared angrily, carried away by a new wave of madness and a wild desire to

break this idiot's close-cropped skull that so resembled a billiard ball.

"The Central Committee has commissioned me to investigate this case," Shustry retorted complacently.

Zudin again felt himself in a raging fever, pricked and tormented by the splinters of the fallen scaffolding. Relishing his own calmness, Shustry fished out of his portfolio a sheet of paper and, like a gravedigger measuring a dead body, put to Zudin the usual series of investigator's questions: age, social position, and the like, quickly writing down the answers, which came monotonously, like the buzzing of a fly in a spider's web.

"Don't you remember any occasions when you accepted from some of your employees certain—tenders—presents—gifts—things?"

"I don't remember."

"Delightful! We shall so record it: 'I don't remember.' Well, now, for example—how about Valts?"

Zudin's face coloured deeply. *Why didn't I remember that? The devil knows what it looks like now!*

"Of course, bribes need not necessarily be received personally. It is much more convenient

to do it through someone at home," Shustry taunted.

"I am aware that my wife once permitted herself, without my knowledge, to accept some trifling things from Valts," Zudin stammered, swallowing his words.

"Without my knowledge! That's excellent! Why didn't you take the trouble to return these trifles? But—never mind, that's beside the point. Well, now, tell me, Comrade Zudin, what do you call trifles? For instance, do you also consider twenty pounds of gold a trifle?" And again Shustry buried his little eyes in the paper.

Zudin's arms shook nervously, as if he were riding in a cart. His thoughts were tangled, and he felt distinctly the approach of some tortuous danger. With all his might he attempted to rise from the chair, but his legs failed him. With a final effort he threw off his coat. This seemed to relieve him.

"Only now do I begin to understand that some horrible nightmarish misunderstanding has arisen out of insignificant facts," Zudin strained through his teeth with difficulty. "Who has concocted this, and why? That must be cleared up. I should not be an old and loyal

member of the party since 1903, having gone through imprisonment and exile, if I did not believe in the strength of the party, its justice, its wisdom."

Shustry smiled sarcastically.

"Perhaps, after all, you will deign to reply to my question directly: Do you admit having received gifts from Valts and from other persons, and do you admit your guilt?"

"Oh, don't worry. I shall answer you with complete sincerity and with a clear conscience."

"You should have done that long ago. Your fate depends only on the degree of your sincerity."

"My fate is of little interest to me. What I prize is *our* fate."

"Well, now, that's much better! And I shall immediately note it in your favour in my report. And so?"

"And so I know that on one occasion my wife accepted from Valts a pair of silk stockings for herself—or it may have been two pairs—I cannot remember for sure." And Zudin recalled Lisa's firm leg as, half undressed, she pulled off the rustling stocking. "Besides this, she accepted two pairs of children's stockings and a few bars of chocolate, which the children

ate. That is all. I know nothing of any other gifts from Valts or from anyone else. And I don't believe that there have been any other gifts."

"Delightful! First: nothing from anyone; then—from Valts through the wife. At first one pair of stockings, then another pair, then two more. A—er—ah—convenient—way to remember. But never mind—that's just for the sake of saying something."

"Do you know what, Comrade Yuzhanin? . . ." (Yuzhanin had been Shustry's former party name, and for some reason it suddenly came to Zudin's tongue.) "I am an old Bolshevik. I have never been anything else, and I shall never be anything else. And what I have told you has been said with the utter sincerity and conviction due not only to a comrade but also a representative of the Central Committee. If you do not wish to believe me, that's your affair."

Shustry was stung to the quick. His fingers drummed angrily on the table.

"As you know, I was once a Menshevik. I can assure you, however, that neither then nor since have I accepted bribes, neither personally nor through anyone near me, neither in the

form of candy nor of gold! . . . But excuse me. This is all beside the point. . . . What about the gold? Did you condescend to accept it, or did you not?"

"I declare again that I have taken no gold, and——"

"But your wife?"

A monstrous suspicion suddenly dawned in Zudin's mind. But what if . . . could it be . . . his wife? . . . Lisa!

"No! That's impossible! Impossible!" Zudin muttered in confusion.

"And you would vouch for that?"

Would he vouch for that? He shrugged his shoulders helplessly, vainly turning his bewildered eyes for support to the dark, cold walls.

"So you cannot vouch? That is more prudent." And Shustry wrote it down.

Miserable shyster! Zudin thought for some unaccountable reason, and was nauseated by the sharp, unpleasant odour of bitter tobacco and the reek of dogs that emanated from the calm Shustry. No tragedy could touch *that* copper brow!

"Well, well. And—what do you know about Pavlov? Did he share anything with you, or—pardon me—with your wife? Or don't you re-

member? Or perhaps you cannot vouch for it!"

Zudin bit his lips until the blood flowed, and was silent for several seconds.

"I repeat, once and for all, that, aside from the instance I have already cited, I am utterly unaware of the receipt by my wife of any things, or money, from any other person, and such an action on her part seems incredible, as far as I know my wife and believe and trust her. I beg you to write it down just like that."

"Now, can you possibly recollect whether or not Katzmann strongly urged the immediate dismissal of Pavlov and Valts, and whether or not you opposed the incident.

Zudin strove to recall the incident.

"You don't remember? And yet this is definitely asserted by Comrade Fomin on the authority of the dead Katzmann. What reason would they have for lying?"

"In regard to Pavlov, I recollect that I was the first to become suspicious of his honesty, especially in regard to the case of Bocharkin. And I immediately confided this mistrust to Comrade Katzmann. Some time later, as I remember, I had a more detailed discussion with him on this subject, and he even suggested that

it was imperative to dismiss Pavlov, and it seems, also Valts."

"'It seems?'"

"Yes: 'It seems.'" Zudin flushed. "I told him that in regard to Pavlov, I agreed, for by that time another of his tricks had been discovered in the case of the diamonds. But, as far as Valts was concerned, I found his charges baseless, and Katzmann agreed with me."

"Yes, of course! Baseless after the gifts to your wife! . . . But, never mind, I'm only jesting. Pay no attention to it. Well, well! In other words, as far as Valts was concerned, you did not agree, but as far as Pavlov, you were in complete agreement? We shall so report it. . . . Now, won't you explain to me why, in spite of all this, Pavlov was not dismissed? I am speaking of Pavlov this time!"

Why, indeed, hadn't he dismissed him? Zudin thought without finding a reply.

"That was my mistake, my fault," he whispered, crestfallen and humble. "I was undoubtedly overworked, and forgot. And just about then came the murder of Katzmann. From then on my mind was certainly not on Valts and Pavlov!"

"Delightful! Well, well, Comrade Zudin.

Will you favour me now with an answer in regard to the relationship between you and Valts? I am asking you, of course, about sexual relations."

"I should think that such a thing would have no bearing——"

"Oh. Do you think so? Well, we'll write that down, too. Nevertheless, I insist upon a straight answer."

"There were no intimate relations between Valts and me."

"So you do not consider being with her at night on the sofa, as your scrubwoman reports, sufficiently intimate? Is that what you want me to understand?"

"What utter, filthy vileness!" Zudin cried, scarcely able to contain himself, and turning crimson with shame and anger. "I told you what I told you, and I have no intention of elaborating further on this theme!"

"Delightful! Well, do you happen to remember the confiscated wine you kept in your office, the occasions when it was drunk and when it was issued to certain of your co-workers and subordinates? . . . Here, for example, Pavlov deposes that the bottles of wine found in his apartment had been taken by him

from your office. What do you say to that?"

"The wine had accidentally come to my office following raids. I didn't drink it, and I didn't give it to anyone. Although, come to think of it, I *do* remember that once, being very tired, I *did* drink a bottle of some light grape wine to pull myself together. How the wine could have come to Pavlov, I don't know. My office is always locked, and only the scrubwoman has the key."

Shustry recorded everything with lightning rapidity.

"Well, I think I've done my share now. Will you be so kind as to read it all and confirm it with your signature?" And pushing the written sheet of paper toward Zudin, he stretched himself with fatigue. Then he ran to the door, opened it, and called to someone in the corridor. He returned and surveyed Zudin with amusement.

"You're a famous fellow, Comrade Zudin! It's too bad, though, that at first you tried to be foxy with me."

"I? . . . Foxy?"

"Don't try to justify yourself! Anyway, that's only my personal opinion, while the decision of the case will be made by the Extra-

ordinary Court Commission which will arrive here in a few days and which ordered me to make the report. My rôle is slight—to be strictly objective. You saw yourself that I recorded not only everything which, in my opinion, spoke against you, but also that which spoke in your favour. I am strictly objective. Well, well. But in the meanwhile, you must permit me to consider you under arrest and to place you under guard.”

In spite of the fact that Zudin had had a foreboding of this, it came as a shock and an insult, and intolerable shame flooded his heart.

“I shall not run away,” he smiled bitterly. “But I hope you will permit me to see my family.”

“Not under any circumstances! You may write letters, but you will be kept here in this room. Don’t get excited. The final decision is a matter of only several days, two or three at the most. And after that—well, that, of course, depends on how the commission will look at it. My only business is to report impartially. Therefore, if you remember anything else in your favour, write it and send it to Ignatyev’s secretary. I shall order them to bring you paper and pencil. Your meals will

be sent up from the dining-room of the Executive Committee."

3

With dull, opaque eyes Zudin stared sightlessly through the windows at the sun-flecked river. The windows, perfectly square, invested the low spacious room with the cosy isolation of an attic. Blocks of ice moved slowly down the river, resembling the broken teeth of some monster. Beyond were the yellowish, two-storied box-like wooden houses of the workers' suburban village. And all the terrible things that had just transpired, things that had never before happened to Zudin, suddenly vanished, buried themselves in the deep crevasses of his soul. On the surface, a feeling of boyish light-heartedness welled up as if the locksmith's shop whither a boy was constantly obliged to hurry on errands was suddenly found to be closed, and now he was carefree and could play pranks to his heart's content. He was buoyant, exhilarated. And within him he felt a steady flame, luminous and warm.

But this mood did not last long. Heavy boots

clattered in the corridor and a sentry entered the room. He was accompanied by a superior who examined Zudin and the room in a hostile, inquisitorial manner. They walked to the window, tested the locks, and then, just as unceremoniously as they had come, they departed. The sentry remained in the corridor outside the door. The butt of his gun tapped on the floor as he mounted his post.

Later, two white-aproned waitresses from the dining-room opened both halves of the door to bring in an iron bedstead and a grey mattress filled with straw. They returned with a cotton sheet, a straw-filled pillow, and a coarse blanket. When they asked Zudin if he wanted something to eat, he refused, but requested pencil and paper.

These were brought in person by Ignatyev's secretary. With lowered eyelashes he tried to conceal the embarrassment he felt as he entered the room, and Zudin's bitterness increased.

"I am going to write a letter to my wife, and I ask you to direct it to her apartment as soon as possible. Can this be done?"

"Yes. Comrade Shustry expects to be here at six o'clock. He will look it over and very likely will send it at once."

"I thank you."

Zudin could scarcely contain his desire to be left alone with the bursting thoughts that rose like leaden storm clouds and hung menacingly over him. He sat down on the creaking bed with its rustling mattress, and buried his head in his hands.

I must calm myself and try to understand what it all means. After all, with what am I charged? One thing is certain: Pavlov and Valts were up to something and were caught red-handed. But what? And what was this talk about gold? Who took it? Was it Pavlov? If so, why am I involved? Because I did not dismiss him? Yes, that was a terrible omission! or was it Valts who took the gold? Could it be that she shared it with Lisa? And is it possible that Lisa accepted it? . . .

Horror possessed Zudin. He shuddered convulsively, and his breath stuck painfully in his chest as he realized what Lisa could expect if that had happened. Oh, if *that* had happened! Oh, if only all of this were empty, unfounded doubts! Could it be that Lisa did not understand all this?

He strove to probe into her soul. No! No! Lisa had not done it, she could not have done

it! After all, she had a worker's pride, the conscience of the class struggle. After all, she was a Communist!

He smiled tolerantly, realizing her simplicity, as frail as tender shoots of grain, her utter lack of worldliness. Where could she have acquired it? She had never participated in the active struggle; her experience had not been his. True, she was a daughter of her class, the wife of her husband, and the mother of her children. But if one were to weigh these on the scales of decision, the latter two would outweigh the former. No one could be blamed for this. The patient slavery of women, who were bound to the chain of their simplest feelings and instincts, was inherited under the age-old economic oppression by man, and it was difficult to change this quickly.

But was it possible that they would shoot her for this? The hair on the top of his head quivered like blades of grass in a wind. He recalled Lisa's quiet, modest smile, Lisa as a young girl, Lisa with a shawl over her head and with dimples in her round rosy cheeks. It had been spring then also when he, full of clumsy embarrassment and unshed ecstatic tears, had wooed her. As if afraid of crushing a timid,

downy flower, he had awkwardly taken her chapped, needle-pricked little fingers and looked into her clear grey eyes.

"Sweet Lisa, let us live together, fight together, suffer together, and love each other as man and wife."

How long ago it seemed! How long ago! Zudin's shoulders sank under the burden of distant, tender recollections.

Well, and afterward? Had they kept their word afterward?

No. He saw that he had been cruelly disappointed. Lisa had proved a true, loving, tender wife, but that was all. He had forgotten that behind her were uncounted centuries of mute, unprotesting female slaves, while he was a man, a master, defying the lightning. Could she have understood his feelings, his strivings, his joys and sorrows, his battles, when her cooking, and the children's cries, and the tiny, narrow world of their small room bound her in a crowded cage against the bars of which dashed the stormy hurricane of the sea of life? He swam in that sea; he struggled against it, stripped, the glint of steel in his grey eyes. To Lisa he came only to rest, to eat, and to look at the amusing little children who, opening

their wondering eyes, stretched their tiny hands to him, their father. He had been annoyed when he noticed that he was growing further and further away from Lisa, that she remained alone, solitary, on the dead level of everyday. . . . Her cheeks faded, the light in her eyes died out, her back grew increasingly stooped. He had cheated her, and the longer they lived the more profound became the deception. Only now did he understand with unexpected clarity that he had deceived her shamelessly and basely, taking unreckoned advantage of her helplessness, her woman's tenderness, and her woman's love. The wonderful symphony of love, of which he had dreamed, had turned out to be a pathetic barrel-organ tune.

If now she were led out to be shot, it was he, and he only, who would be her murderer.

His throat swelled with grief and pity.

But could he have acted differently? Could he have given up his struggle and his suffering for the happiness of all of mankind—for the happiness of the whole world—and taken in exchange the canary-like solicitude for a beloved woman? Had he not already paid altogether too much for having tied himself to a

family? Because of the hungry cry of his little children—how much better it would be if workers had no children!—it had often been necessary, lowering his eyes in shame, to drop the hand lifted for the blow. And the weight of the hammer in his suddenly limp hand had become the cruel goad of a huge, sneering monster with a brown stomach blown up into a whole world, and with paunchy round cheeks that disappeared beyond the clouds.

Who was guilty? It was he, that insatiable, swollen Moloch, sitting in excrement and blood! For one moment of madness Zudin wished he might become a tiny, tiny . . . bee? . . . bullet? . . . no! the thinnest, sharpest steel needle, so that, utterly unnoticed, he could plunge triumphantly, plunge into the very tenderest spot of the monster's brain, and it would totter, grow limp, blister like a punctured balloon, collapse and flatten itself out, while exultant voices rejoiced in its downfall!

He pulled himself together. How absurd! It was not as simple as that. And Lisa, no matter whose the blame, Lisa was lost!

But what if Lisa had not accepted the gold at all? He sprang up with joy and took several steps toward the window. Would she really be

punished so cruelly because of the stockings, because she had taken the chocolate, because she did not understand a thing about politics, and had remained a loving mother and a wife who wanted to be attractive to her husband? What a damned, bewitched, vicious circle in a squirrel's cage! And how stupidly it had appeared in his deposition: She took it without my knowledge.

What does that mean? "Without my knowledge"? Since he had learned of it later, and had limited himself only to a reprimand, it meant that *he* had taken it and not his wife. Why had he expressed it so ambiguously? Had he been afraid for himself? He would write to her about it immediately, so that she could rectify that mistake when she was questioned.

But he remembered that the letter would have to go through Shustry's hands. And he was irritated that he should again have to be foxy and evasive. With whom? With comrades whose dreams and labours he had shared all his life! He dropped his head and began to examine the dusty hardwood floor. Then he looked through the windows and saw again the clear sky, the floating, broken ice, and the yellow houses on the other side of the river

where the windows blazed with the setting sun. He glanced at the watch on his wrist.

The devil take it! It is six o'clock. Shustry has probably already come and may leave at once. I must hurry with my letter to Lisa.

What should he write? How should he write? Should he write at all? Why not let events move as calmly and dispassionately as this proud river bore away its burden of ice, the river which knew neither its laws nor its goal? Under the warm rays of the sun, its frozen bosom cracked and thundered; under the deep blue sky of night its restless waters quieted, ceased to move, turned again to ice.

But then he might not return soon, perhaps never. What would she think, alone, pathetic, with two children? What if loose tongues spread tales about him, about the gold, the wine, about the mistress, Valts? How much agonized thinking, how much suffering was ahead of her! What was the purpose of this unnecessary pain, this burden of torment and torture? If he could only remove it from her pitiful shoulders.

With sudden decision he sat down at the table and wrote:

DEAR LISA:

A silly accident and an investigation concerning recently disclosed crimes of Pavlov and Valts will detain me for a few brief days under house arrest at the Central Committee. Don't grieve and don't worry. The pile of ridiculous accusations with which I am charged in regard to some gold, wine, and even a love intrigue will disperse like smoke. What is needed is courage and patience. Don't lose heart; be strong, and kiss the children for me. Valts has involved the stockings and chocolate we accepted in this matter. All of this is, of course, rank nonsense.

I kiss you tenderly, tenderly. Until I see you again very soon,

Your
ALEXEY.

I must lie, I must lie impudently. Then he folded the letter like an envelope for powder and asked the sentry outside the door to call the secretary. After a long, exhausting wait, a messenger finally appeared.

"Please give this letter as soon as possible to the secretary of Comrade Ignatyev. It is very urgent."

The messenger nodded and disappeared. Lost in thought, Zudin stood immobile, like a stone pillar at the crossing of two dusty roads, looking impassively under his brows at the

crimson wings of the evening darkness that drooped over the mist of the paling river.

6

For five days Zudin sat alone. No one came to find out about him; no one called on him. At times it seemed that he had been forgotten by everyone in the bustle of nerve-racking, petty affairs, in the clatter and strain of the civil war. Somewhere, perhaps not far away, gaunt or corpulent generals, in dusty uniforms and gilded epaulettes, galloped from one village to another, advancing and retreating. Grey soldiers swarmed clumsily across the fields from one horizon to another, stooping, squatting, naïvely hiding behind transparent bushes; they fell before the stings of an invisible scourge, writhing in the convulsions of death, with sagging knees, twisted wrists, and stiffened fingers.

He received no newspapers. Every day dinner was brought to him; frequently he did not even touch it. He became thin and emaciated, his eyes and cheeks sank. He seemed years older. He grew exceedingly careless. Without

undressing, he would fall asleep at odd times, rise at odd times, scarcely noting the line of demarcation between night and day, wondering often whether it was morning or evening.

Once he went to the window and found an answer to his peering gaze in the light of the sinking sun. He sighed.

He stared indifferently at the dusty ochreous colour of the little houses on the banks of the river, until it seemed to him that these houses had died and that the lights in their windows were the phosphorescence of decay. Dropping his eyes and sitting on the broad low windowsill, he saw a bit of the garden under the windows, the pruned black branches of grey poplars, the faded lawns, shaggy with last year's withered grass and dried leaves. At the end of the garden was a low stone wall. Under the windows the sentry walked up and down. *They have not forgotten me!*

At times he listened to what was going on—there, in the world he had abandoned; and it seemed to him that he heard the windows rattle from the distant shots of cannon.

Once when the door was open he heard through the corridor, from somewhere below, muffled cries and noises that were like the beat-

ing ebb and flow of the dark sea.

"It's a session of the Soviet," said the servant who had brought his supper. "The Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries are making a disturbance. They demand the dissolution of the Cheka. There are strikes in the city because of the food rations. The workers have refused to go to the front. Krastilitsy has been taken. All the Communists have been mobilized. . . . You can't imagine how many students have gathered here! And all of them are going to the front, all to the front!" And she whispered in his ear: "I hear the workers want to rebel. . . . Perhaps then they'll let you out . . ."

Zudin gritted his teeth.

On the evening of the fifth day, when dusk was falling and the electricity had just been turned on, Shustry ran into the room quite unexpectedly and nodded to him:

"Let's go!"

Accompanied by the sentry, they made their way a little distance along the corridor and entered a room. At a table sat people well known to Zudin. Their faces were intent and serious. There was the old veteran party worker Tkacheyev, whom Zudin did not know intimately but whom he had met frequently at

congresses. His was the grave and noble figure of an Old Believer who took full pleasure in his dignity and in his broad, well-combed beard that covered the plank-like chest and stomach. He glanced calmly with his round eyes at those who entered, and with equal calmness and composure dropped his eyes to the table. At the other end of the table sat an old friend of Zudin's, the metal-worker Vasya Shcheglov. His face was actually bird-like, small, pointed upward, surmounted by a crest of white hair, while in his long thin neck his prominent Adam's apple shifted nervously. Between these two, at the middle of the table, sat the severest comrade of all, Stepan himself. His thin, dry nose always seemed to be sniffing the air. The deeply sunken hollows of his cheeks accentuated his thinness and the bony outline of his skull under the half-closed, thoughtful eyes. He had a sparse goatee and scanty hair. And about these three who sat there in silence was a premonition of evil for Zudin, something strange and ominous, like the Hindu Trinity. Only the dark young man who sat opposite them before sheets of paper, with his shabby military uniform and his drabness and the muffled scratching of his secretarial prose,

relieved the mystical solemnity of this council.

Zudin was on the point of stepping forward to shake hands with them, but thinking that this might be construed as an attempt to curry favour, he nodded his head in embarrassment and awkwardly took the chair that was indicated by their glances. On the other side of the table, opposite him, the belligerent Shustry pulled off his coat, slapped his briefcase on the table, and sat down.

Stepan, looking at no one, continued to draw intricate figures on a sheet of paper that lay before him, while Shcheglov, constantly repressing his strained, embarrassed smile, moved his bewildered eyes from side to side as if glad that he had met his old friend Zudin again, but at the same time frightened by the resounding tread of his growing responsibility for another's fate. Finally, stopping his drawing, Stepan transferred his eyes to Shustry and hardly removed them from then on while the latter spoke. With increasing confusion and timidity Shcheglov's boyish eyes jumped between Shustry and Zudin. Only Tkacheyev, sitting like a statue of Buddha, seemed to stare through the table with his lowered glance.

"The present case, comrades," Shustry be-

gan, swaying importantly in his chair and throwing a barrage of piercing glances at Zudin—"the present case is unprecedented in the experience of our party life and in the revolutionary struggle!"

In his hands he held sheets of paper which he frequently flipped over, bending low over them, and then turning immediately to pierce either Stepan or Zudin with fiery, fanatical eyes. His voice rang out and beat against the ceiling, like bells across the steppes.

"Here before you sits *not* a rank-and-file worker, *not* an inexperienced youth, but one of the oldest members of the party, a revolutionist since the year 1903," Shustry continued, drawing out his words. "And now, at a dangerous, critical moment of the revolution, this hero has sunk so low that, holding an important post in the Soviet government and the party—the office of chairman of the Provincial Cheka—he has betrayed, from filthy motives of cupidity, the trust placed in him by the working class! He has corrupted and disorganized the apparatus which we regard as the watchful eye of the proletarian dictatorship, and was himself the first to give the nightmarish example of rapacious bribe-taking, corruption,

and drunkenness, and has surrounded himself with worthy collaborators from among the agents of our most vicious, counter-revolutionary enemies. There is still much of the activity of Citizen Zudin that has not yet been revealed by the investigation, but that which has been uncovered is quite sufficient to delay no longer your just revolutionary sentence. . . .

"... I apologize for being somewhat carried away and for trespassing the limits of my rôle as an objective investigator," he muttered, suddenly dropping his eyes, having evidently caught something in the glance of Stepan. "But, comrades, when one has to speak of such loathsome things, it is difficult to restrain one's indignation! . . .

"... From the very detailed depositions which I have gathered from several persons, among them Zudin himself and his henchmen, the fact is definitely established that Zudin, using his unlimited authority as chairman of the Provincial Cheka, took into his service and brought into close relations with himself as secretary and mistress, a definitely active counter-revolutionary, Citizen Yelena Valts, who had previously been arrested by the Cheka and was subject to execution. Prolong-

ing this intimacy with her, and patronizing her in every way, it is clear that Zudin could not help knowing of her relations with that most dangerous British spy and organizer of White Guard attacks, Mr. Edward Hackey, whom the All-Union Cheka was energetically and vainly seeking at the very time that he passed at least two nights with Valts, as she was herself obliged to admit. At the present moment Hackey has succeeded in hiding himself, and therefore the recent number of bestial murders of our most responsible comrades, especially, the recent murder of the most honest Comrade Katzmann, have occurred, to put it mildly, not without the indirect participation of Citizen Zudin. Such monstrous treason the world has never before seen!

"But Citizen Zudin was far from limiting himself to this. Having betrayed the party and the revolution, having doomed to death the old comrades who had trusted him, Zudin revealed in these nightmarish abominations that he was least of all impelled by political reasons, although such are also undoubtedly self-evident to all of us. Zudin's basic purpose was to use his power and the confidence vested in him for purposes of personal enrichment. As a

quite objective investigator, let me state that Zudin did not limit himself to the receiving of bribes from his faithful assistant, Valts, who served him as a convenient tool in all his crimes. No! This Zudin is exceedingly sly and canny! He did not limit himself to the initial bribes—articles and products for domestic use, which Valts bought with the bribes she received on his behalf, and which she thus shared with her lover and guide, Zudin. This was the case, for example, with the silk stockings for Zudin's wife. At other times Valts gave Zudin things in kind which she received from the White Guards; for example, the chocolate which she received in the quantity of twenty pounds from the same British spy, Hackey.

"No, I repeat, Zudin did not stop at this. At his instigation, Valts blackmailed the family of the rich jewellery merchant, Chotkin, whose son had been arrested and kept in prison at Zudin's order for almost four months without reason. Threatening that young Chotkin would be shot, Valts extracted from old Chotkin twenty pounds of gold in things and coin, for Zudin. Although Valts now denies that Zudin had any connection with this extortion, such a connection is fully established by the fact that, in the

first place, Chotkin was freed by Zudin's personal order on the very day that Comrade Katzmann was murdered, and immediately after Valts had driven the bargain with Chotkin's parents about the sum total of the bribe; and, in the second place, at the direction of this same Zudin, the office manager of the Provincial Cheka, Shalenko, gave Valts a most unusual, an unprecedented duplicate order for the release of young Chotkin—this was, of course, for purposes of blackmailing the father; and finally, in the third place, the twenty pounds of gold were without a doubt given to Zudin and deftly hidden by him, because again Valts has not been able to find the gold, and she is now twisted in her explanations, vociferously assuring us that it was stolen from under her bed during her absence. Besides all this, it is perfectly logical and natural to assume that Zudin's bribe-taking would not have stopped at silk stockings and chocolate, of which, because of Valts's talkativeness, it seems that nearly all of the workers of the Cheka knew but kept silent, terrorized by Zudin. We shall speak of this again later on.

"By the way, Zudin himself, in the course of his examination, attempted at first to deny

that he received the stockings, the chocolate, and the gold, but later, as a result of clearly established charges against him, he was forced to confess their 'acceptance,' as he put it, by himself or by his wife—Zudin is now attempting to put all the blame on his wife—and was compelled to admit that through Valts he accepted bribes in the shape of silk stockings and gold."

"Gold?" Zudin asked, quietly, his swollen lips trembling.

"I'm sorry—a slip of the tongue. Chocolate, not gold. For the time being, Zudin denies the taking of gold."

Zudin shrank. Of what was he thinking? His mind was a blank. A pathetic smile of perplexity and hopelessness flickered over his pale face. All his sensations came entirely from his subconsciousness, and it was thus that he seemed to remember that, for a long time, he had walked, confident and sure of himself, along a hard, difficult path, and that suddenly he had slipped, falling unexpectedly into the very midst of a gigantic waterfall. Now he was flying irrevocably with it into a dark abyss, deafened by the chaos and roar of the incomprehensible natural forces, not even attempting to reach for the

sharp jags of the cliffs that lacerated him as they flashed by, because the very impressions of them rose to his consciousness too late, after he had already passed them. Now he was thinking of nothing. He sensed complete helplessness, terror, a faint memory of the acute consciousness that had been left behind somewhere above him, and of death that was flying to meet him somewhere below. It seemed to him that at times someone's persistent glances crept over him. Perhaps they came from the squinting eyes of Comrade Stepan, or perhaps it was the tormented glance of his friend, Shcheglov. Or was it the secretary scratching away with his pen, who was stealthily looking at him, with his open mouth and round, startled eyes like an owl suddenly awakened by the curiosity of a street crowd? Zudin had no time to grasp this clearly. He was overthrown and carried away by the hurricane flow of Shustry's speech.

"Yes, comrades, I am an investigator, trying to be objective," Shustry continued, casting his fiery gaze at everyone. "I must, however, state my conviction, and it is your affair whether you agree or not with my conviction that Citizen Zudin is a profoundly insincere man."

"How? . . . Sincere? . . ." Stepan asked, not having heard aright.

"A very *insincere* man!" Shustry emphasized louder and more distinctly than ever, and Zudin felt Comrade Stepan's sharp glance again scratch his face.

"An insincere man," Shustry repeated, shaking his head. "I have already expressed this conviction to Citizen Zudin's face, and he will not try to deny this. As a matter of fact, he did not confine himself merely to the services of Valts who, as a simon-pure White Guard adherent, was more useful to him than others. No, he did not confine himself to her. The Provincial Cheka became filled with all kinds of riffraff under his patronage, bribe-takers, crooks, and, in general, all sorts of adventurers of the shadiest reputation, who, of course, interfered with and nullified the work of those honest comrades who had the grave misfortune of working with Zudin. Since I do not wish to be merely verbose, I shall cite, as an example, that same Pavlov, a barefaced bribe-taker and blackmailer who attempted to extort large sums of money from persons under his jurisdiction in various cases placed in his hands, and who also, of course, shared these sums

with Zudin. He is now arrested, as well as Valts.

"Concerning the character of this Pavlov, Zudin was clearly informed by the late Katzmann, as Comrade Fomin testifies, and even Zudin himself does not now deny it. What is more, he assures us that it was he, Zudin, who was the first to rouse Katzmann's suspicion against Pavlov. That this is a barefaced lie by Zudin is evident, because, first of all, in spite of his avowed protestations, Zudin did not dismiss Pavlov from the Provincial Cheka—obviously no longer necessary after the death of Katzmann, who had been the one to insist on the dismissal of Pavlov; and secondly, even now, after the arrest of Pavlov and Valts, Zudin has attempted to protest against the arrest of both these heroes, Pavlov as well as Valts, and in my presence, in the office of Ignatyev, he characterized their arrest as—how would you think?—'the breaking-up of the Cheka'! Ignatyev offers corroborating evidence on this point, but I do not believe that even Zudin himself would attempt to deny this.

"Furthermore, comrades, the greedy and treacherous character of Zudin was distinguished by his bestial stubbornness and cruelty.

Notwithstanding the fact that he himself was the principal, indirect accomplice in the assassination of Comrade Katzmann, this did not prevent him, with murderous insistence, from carrying through the Collegium of the Provincial Cheka, forced into obedience by him, the decision to shoot a hundred of the more outstanding bourgeois arrested by the Cheka, but who, for the most part, were innocent people. It is not necessary to explain that such a deed was the best method of agitation against the Soviet power among the general run of people, who are always watching us."

"For what, then, are you pleading now?" burst from Zudin.

"The triumph of revolutionary justice, nothing more!"

"But does such a thing exist?"

"That we shall see! What else now? I am afraid that, as it is, I have already wearied the comrades with an exceedingly long speech on a case which essentially is extremely clear and simple, and which astounds one only with the monstrousness of such a crime by an exceedingly responsible party member and erstwhile comrade. Therefore, I shall not bother to supplement my report with the mention of the

orgies with confiscated wine, a full cellar of which was kept in Zudin's office, and which Pavlov also managed to use, despite the fact that, according to Zudin, the office was always locked in his absence. Neither shall I mention the amorous adventures of Zudin with Valts on the sofa in his office, the accidental witness of which was the scrubwoman who heard a part of their conversation through the door. These are only the lesser characteristic lines of the principal matter in the case which I have outlined."

A long, oppressive silence set in. Everyone glanced at Zudin.

"Do you wish to give explanations?" asked Stepan.

"Yes, yes! Of course!" Zudin jerked out, as if he had just awakened from a dream.

"Only we must see that these explanations do not evolve into futile time-wasting. We must set a limit," Shustry barked.

"Yes, yes. We'll see later," Stepan put him off, wrinkling his face in displeasure. And turning to Zudin, he added, "Go on. We are listening to you."

But Zudin's thoughts, always so alive and clear, now dangled limply like rags. *Where*

shall I begin?

"Comrades," he said, shaking from head to foot, "you are, of course, free to believe me or to disbelieve me, but I shall be frank with you now, as I have always been frank. Is it possible that the long years of our work together, underground and now, will not be sufficient proof to you of my truthfulness?"

He felt that he was talking silly nonsense, not at all what he had planned to say at this moment when he had been awaiting the trial. And he was enraged by Shustry, whose eyes gleamed maliciously as he obviously enjoyed his distress.

"We ask you not to mention your past. All of us are sufficiently well aware of it. We ask you to give us clear and succinct explanations of the essential points on which you are accused by the investigator. Do you or do you not acknowledge yourself guilty?" the cold, hard voice of Comrade Stepan suddenly lashed Zudin.

"Yes, yes! Right away, right away!" he replied, becoming still more confused and feeling a panic of fear rushing over him, fear not because he was facing the tragic end of his life, which was flying to meet him like a mad train,

with the glowing eyes of catastrophe growing larger and clearer, but fear that he would remain solitary and alone if he were not understood, if he were not able to express to these people quickly all the innocence, all the justice of his case, and fear that he might be interrupted in the midst of his statement. Why was the swollen human tongue so slow, and poor, and clumsy?

He understood that now, immediately, without delay, he must gather his last strength, all the thoughts of his entire life, strain himself and fling himself in a desperate blow against something that was thick, infinitely heavy and hateful, something that had oppressed him throughout his altogether too long life, beginning when he had been still a nimble, carefree little boy, and that now had fallen upon him to crush him, to annihilate him. But against what should he throw himself? Around him were his own intimate comrades—even this Shustry who was sputtering viciously in triumph. But did that mean that there was nothing for him to do but perish, without offering a word in proof of his probity, without even crying out across the entire width of the human world in the voice

of a beast that was being slaughtered, flaming with the hope that somewhere might be found a sensitive, compassionate response, even if now it were still hidden in seeds yet blind, but which in the future would burst and bring forth new people with new feeling and new ways of thinking?

"I am not guilty," Zudin said firmly. "I am not guilty," he repeated with greater stubbornness, and his voice began to sound more resonant and stronger, and his words began to pierce the ears of his listeners like sharp, glowing tongs. "It is not true that Valts was my mistress, that she was about to be shot, and that I saved her because of my passion for her. All of this is a lie. She was arrested because she was accidentally mixed up in a conspiracy of Savinkov's agent, Finikov. But she had nothing to do with it. This was my profound conviction. I was very sorry for her. I thought that an honest job would help to bring her to her feet as a human being, and would help her to shake off the cobweb of the despicable bourgeois mode of life. But apparently I made a mistake. Chocolate proved stronger."

"*What* proved stronger?" everybody asked him at once.

"Chocolate!" Shustry jeered.

"Yes! Chocolate! It proved stronger. . . . The fact that she had any relations with Hackey I hear now for the first time. This amazes me. I cannot explain all of this to myself at once. Evidently the soul of another person must remain a mystery. It is true that Valts once came to my house and presented my wife with stockings and with chocolate for the children. She explained that as an actress—for she is a former ballet dancer—she had a good deal of this superfluous luxury from former days, and moreover, that one of her former co-workers had brought her presents from the front. To tell you the truth, I was sufficiently naïve and foolish to believe this story. If I had been at home when she offered these gifts, I am sure that we should not have accepted them. But my wife, without thinking much about it, took them during my absence, and later it was rather awkward for me to return them. Besides, frankly, I did not want to hurt my wife's feelings. In my foolishness, I then considered all of these as trifles. That Valts took a bribe of twenty pounds of gold from the Chotkins, I hear now for the first time. I remember now that she was particularly insistent about his

liberation, and even then there stirred within me a vague suspicion, but Chotkin was in prison without cause, in consequence of our general confusion, and he should have been freed long before. Undoubtedly he would have continued to sit in prison for the devil knows how much longer, because of the negligence of the investigator who had gone away, if the case had not accidentally come into Valts's hands."

"So, according to you, it seems that Valts took the bribe in a just cause?" Shustry interjected ironically.

"Enough of that!" Stepan checked him.

"Even so," continued Zudin, "I have never given anyone instructions to issue a duplicate order. In a word, all charges concerning my connection with Hackey, my share in this gold, and in general concerning any unclean relations with Valts, are the purest kind of dragged-in nonsense. It is true that on one occasion, in the evening, she made overtures to me as she was sitting on the sofa, and began to speak of love. At that time it seemed to me that she was sincere. But I waved it aside immediately, then and there. If the scrubwoman eavesdropped, she can confirm all of this. Everything in regard to

Pavlov is likewise sheer nonsense. I always suspected him of being a swindler, and I even discussed this with Katzmann. We decided to dismiss him, but the pressure of business and a series of events that occurred all at once . . . well, we simply had no time for it, that was all. It is very painful, comrades, to hear what form this has assumed in the 'most objective' speech of Comrade Yuzhanin."

Zudin shifted his position and uttered these words biting and contemptuously.

"The same applies to the 'orgies.' What orgies? Where were these orgies? If they brought us confiscated wine, and if these bottles vanished without our being aware of the fact, that is bad, and, if you wish, shameful. You can't look out for everything. But why all these fairy tales concerning orgies, of which Comrade Yuzhanin spoke so sonorously? After all, I am still Zudin, and not some rounder!" he flung out with more anger than ever at Shustry.

"Even worse," shouted the latter, springing up as if he were on pins and needles.

"Enough!" cried Stepan, motioning to both of them.

"But of all the accusations against me, the

most absurd is that I maliciously carried out provocative terrorism! Unless I am mistaken, that is how Yuzhanin estimated my crime. Like a bandit I shot a hundred innocent citizens in revenge for the death of Katzmann! I can understand anything you like, comrades, but this accusation I have no powers at all to comprehend. In the first place, this decision was not my personal decision, but that of the entire Collegium in session, with Fomin and Ignatyev present. True, I insisted on the shooting. But did anyone really oppose me?"

"You had them all terrorized, every one of them!" Shustry interrupted.

"Or perhaps a belated repentance for having been a party to the commission of this sin is now impelling some of us to beat a retreat and to wash our hands of it by shifting the blame from weak shoulders to strong ones!" Zudin smiled caustically. "Well, it is quite possible that the time will come when we ourselves shall judge those of our comrades who have most energetically executed our slogans and our orders. But I am not afraid of responsibility, and if I were again faced with the same situation, I would act precisely as I did act and not otherwise."

"Of course! Of course!" Stepan approved vociferously. Even Tkacheyev, who sat like a frozen image, raised his eyelids and looked at Zudin.

"I killed a hundred prisoners," Zudin said, enunciating his words so clearly that they rang out like blows being struck on copper. "And I did not take into account their guilt. In essence, does guilt exist? Is a bourgeois guilty because he is bourgeois? Or is a crocodile guilty because he is a crocodile? Do we not gladly accept into our midst as blood brothers in our common struggle scores of the most bestial counter-revolutionaries, provided it is possible for them, with profound honesty, to destroy their old convictions with the dynamite of thought and feeling? And do we not, at the same time, place some of our most talented youngsters behind bars, youths who have done very much for the revolution in the past, and who, because of their foolishness, stubbornness, or class antecedents, are actually our worst enemies and the advance guard of capitalism?"

"Do you wish to place yourself also in this category?" Shustry asked with a broad smile.

"Myself?" Zudin was puzzled. "No. I was speaking of the fact that I was right in shoot-

ing a hundred prisoners without taking into consideration their guilt or innocence, because guilt or innocence, in your Philistine sense of the word, does not exist for me—and that's all. But don't think either, Comrade Yuzhanin, that I was guided by a feeling of revenge toward this pathetic swarm of our enemies. Vengeance less than anything else could ever inspire me. Let this silly prejudice remain the consolation of naïve people, the infantile comfort of striking the edge of the table against which the child has hit himself while running, or the desire to whip the sea which had sunk the boat. Vengeance is empty self-deception. And yet, if you please, I shot the prisoners, fully aware that they were absolutely innocent."

"Monstrous reasoning!" Shustry bellowed from his chair.

Tkacheyev's eyes lighted up as he lifted his stolid gaze to Zudin. Shcheglov, flushing deeply, stared at him in excitement. Only Stepan continued to scribble good-naturedly on the paper.

"The organization of capitalists killed Katzmann. It is not important that certain foolish Socialist-Revolutionaries mistakenly consider themselves enemies of capitalism. Their

opinion doesn't matter. We know, as a matter of fact, that they serve conscientiously as the vanguard, the front-line fighters in the camp of the bourgeoisie. Their personal convictions in no way alter the essence of the case; we are carrying on a class struggle of international ramifications. The blow had to be countered with a blow in response. They struck at an individual because they do not understand public affairs and their laws. *I* struck a blow at the class. I destroyed the first representatives of their class I could lay my hands on—only the first, no more and no less—and I lifted that destruction to the rank of an unavoidable consequence of their act. Would those dear little fellows want to repeat their attack? Don't worry, they will not repeat it! They know that it will cost them even more."

"You are not being accused on that score," Stepan interrupted him. "We understand this. We know the significance of class terror, and when it becomes unavoidable and indispensable. Only, of course, we destroy, first of all, the more active ones and the organizers of the class that is hostile to us. This is how we do things. Doubts and repentance we shall leave to windbags. But now perhaps you had better

answer two questions that I have noted here," he continued, stretching forth a sheet of paper to Zudin.

"Why was not Valts shadowed?

"What will be the impression of this entire affair among the employees of the Cheka and all members of the party, as well as in the broad circles of the workers, who are already informed by wide-flung gossip that Zudin has taken bribes through his wife?"

"Yes. That was my inadvertence," Zudin said in a crushed tone. "What impression? . . . The very worst," he whispered, dropping his head. He could not endure his shame.

Stepan turned to his neighbours. "Has anyone else any other questions?"

There were no other questions. Only Shustry sprang up to say something, but seeing he was the only one, he lowered his eyes in confusion and left his words unsaid.

Stepan carried on a whispered conversation, first with Tkacheyev and then with Shcheglov, and both of them nodded their heads.

"Will you see to it, Comrade Shustry, that for the time being Comrade Zudin is taken back to his room?" And turning to Zudin, he added, "The commission will summon you, or

will inform you of its decision—" and looking at his watch, "—when that is reached."

Again Zudin felt that a painful burden had fallen upon him. In bewilderment, he sought his coat on the chair, until he remembered that he had come without it. Accompanied by Shustry, still red and perspiring, he went out through the door, embarrassed, exhausted, his heart pounding madly. The same sentry, officiously taking his place behind his back, escorted him back to the former room with the square niches of dark windows. Zudin shivered.

Somewhere, far, far away on the horizon, glowed the reflection of cannon fire.

And the city that seemed dead looked into his window with sightless eyes.

P A R T I V

ZUDIN lay on the bed. What was going to happen now? Oh, could anyone tell! He could think no more. His heart beat with hot shame: how could it be that Zudin, always so careful, always so wary, had suddenly involved himself and others in trouble, jeopardizing the cause, the world revolution, his old party, the confidence of the working class? Was it possible that all of this was not a dream, but reality?

He covered his face with trembling hands, and before him rose old thoughts over which he had meditated many times, and pictures which appeared to his eyes now in an entirely different light.

An overhanging sky across which crawled dirty tufts of clouds; a broad ploughed field, sodden under the autumnal rain; along a wet clay road a huge, hairy peasant, clothed in rags and a torn coat, wearily dragged his feet. His face, weather-stained and furrowed with wrinkles, resembled the chocolate-coloured face of

some saint on an old Vladimir ikon. His hunched back loomed against the cloud-sattered sky, and he coughed, gazing patiently and stupidly at the mesh of rain that hung above his head.

What a heroic fellow-traveller! Zudin dreamed. With this giant at my side, I shall not get lost!

"Why are you so dejected, you king of the earth?" he asked.

The peasant slowed his pace and, squinting kindly, looked down at Zudin.

"I am hungry, my friend, I am hungry."

"But tell me, honest toiler, who had strength enough to take your bread from you?"

The giant stopped and lowered his eyes to the thick dough of the muddy road.

"No one took it away, my dear boy. I gave it away myself, to my master. We share everything here. Everything." And he sighed heavily.

"But is it possible that you left nothing for yourself? You *did* leave something for yourself, didn't you? Then, what did you do with it?"

"My dear boy, the taxes ate it up. And then I had to buy a wheel for my weaving loom,

and lumber and a few nails. You see, my hut was beginning to cave in. So I had to bring what was left to the office, to the grain elevator."

"My good friend,"—and Zudin stretched out his hand—"come to your senses! Ah, what if both of us together were to strike at your master, and at the traders! Come! Let's plough the entire world in a new way, *our* way. Then we'll begin to live! To live! And you will keep all your crop, even to the last grain! Would you like that? Then you and I will create *such* a farm! Just like in a fairy tale! A wonderful giant horse made of brass and with a mane of blue fire will till the land without food or pay. Just give me time and I'll do it all for you!"

"That is strange talk," said the peasant, looking around, while moisture like steel spangles glittered slyly in his eyes. "Rifle the pockets of the master? Why not? It's possible, very possible, but only if it's done in a peaceful way. Anyone can see that it would be easier to live then. But as for the fiery horse—aren't you lying? How could we ever get anything like that? What we need, as you must know yourself, neighbour, is something a bit simpler

than that kind of a trick. It would do us much more good. But tell me, brother, tell me honestly, right away, will no one take our grain away from us any more?" And the suspicious glance of his grey eyes pierced Zudin like long, thin needles.

"Listen, my good friend. Do you really think that nuts without their shells will fall straight down from heaven into your mouth? For the sake of the wonderful horse, and to save yourself from the master, won't you consent to go hungry for a little while longer? Or perhaps even more, to share your last piece of bread with the whole world, so that later we may all be free, without masters or merchants? Think it over."

The peasant thought for a long time, breathing laboriously. Then he waved his hand.

"Ekh, brother! It won't be for a long time? But what else is to be done? No matter what happens we're lost. It's difficult to get accustomed to new ways. It's hard on the stomach. Still, brother, I suppose it's best to follow your way. But we'll die anyhow. And you—how do I know that you won't deceive us?"

"A fine sparrow you are, brother! Afraid of a mosquito! Can't you see that I am just as

hungry as you are? Together we shall fight, and then together we shall share everything! In the meanwhile, share a bit of your bread with me, and then fall in step and follow me. Walk livelier, so that you don't lag behind! If you don't, you'll be no better off than now! And just look at yourself and see what an absurd fellow you are!"

The peasant hung his head. He pulled a piece of bread from beneath his coat, broke it in half, and for a long time tried to judge which piece was smaller so that he might give that one to Zudin. But looking out of the corner of his eye he suddenly noticed that Zudin was watching him. Immediately he stretched forth the larger half, and then clumsily shambled after him, his knees wobbling, his feet sloshing in the sticky mud. Zudin walked forward in high spirits, swinging his legs and sinking them firmly into the sprawling clay of the road. The giant muzhik was scarcely able to keep up with him. He could scarcely breathe, stopped frequently, and then made a great effort to catch up, wiping the sweat from his face with the palm of his hand.

"Hey, friend! Try to slow down a bit. Can't we walk a little slower? I simply can't keep up

with you! I have grown weak without bread. The piece I gave you was the last I had. I've kept it for a long time for my own reserves, and now I have nothing."

"Never mind. Buck up, old friend! We must hurry, or you and I will not succeed. All the roads will be washed away. I am just as weak as you are. You must realize that, since I have asked you for bread. But look at me! See how I walk! You must be able to do everything."

Zudin tried to push the piece of bread into his own pocket, but something interfered. The piece would not go in. He shoved his hand into his pocket and pulled out—what was it? In his hands was a huge, fragrant piece of chocolate, wet from the rain. The peasant transfixed him with angry eyes.

"What is that? Have you deceived me? You have taken my last piece of bread and you have candy!"

"Comrade, this is an accident——"

"You lie!"

Zudin shivered helplessly. *He will not believe me. It is an accident, but he will not believe me! I am lost!*

He ran, slipped in the mud, lifted himself again, only to fall again. He was covered with

the sticky brown mass. . . . Was it clay? . . . Or was it chocolate? . . . How could he tell? Would he be able to run beyond the endless mesh of autumn rain? His legs grew weaker and weaker, heavy with the thick porridge of earthen putty. The hoarse breathing of the peasant came nearer and nearer. No! He would not escape!

"No, I cannot escape!" Zudin said aloud, and opened his eyes.

As before, the room was quiet and empty. The light shed by the single electric lamp was faint. Zudin shuddered slightly.

How had it happened to come out like this? What had he done? Wherein was his mistake? And why were they deliberating so long? What would be their decision? Could it be that they would kill him mercilessly for an absent-minded blunder, for childish inadvertence? At once he remembered Shustry and Shustry's "revolutionary justice."

Again he lay face up on the bed without undressing, and firmly closed his eyes with both hands.

What is this accursed chocolate, chocolate, chocolate which persecutes me so irrevocably? Where did it come from?

In his head a scarcely audible noise whirled and rustled, lulling him and at the same time stirring him with a dark, uncertain restlessness. It was like the sound of a waterfall, or the murmur of a forest. Oh, this noise, familiar to him since his childhood, was as much a part of him as were gyves to a convict who had known long imprisonment. He knew it well, knew all the subtleties, the undulations, the nuances which others could not sense.

And then he saw himself, a pale, undernourished child, more like a hunted little wild beast than anything else, with grey hollows of eyes and puckered lips. Already this familiar noise sang its rustling song in his ears. *Shu-shu-shu ... shu-shu*. But Zudin smiled quietly. He knew. He knew that this was the song of driving belts and pulleys and looms as they turned and thundered and ran and buzzed.

He held to the support with small, weak hands and watched intently the thin shavings of hot iron curls crawl past his hands and fall at his bare feet, burning them. A broken, dirty, turning lathe shook unsteadily, moved by a

belt, caught under the ceiling behind a turning pulley on a roller. The large dim cellar was stuffy, dirty, unpleasant, and deserted. There was nothing there except the forgotten, ancient lathe and the little boy. Oh, but no! There was somebody else. That was the boss. Sprawled over a broken chair, he dozed near the lathe, half drunk, waking from time to time to peer under his sleepy eyelids with the watchful gaze of a prison warder.

"Work, you loafer! Work, you carrion! Don't be lazy or I'll pull your ears out by the roots!"

The tufts of his beard were tangled with dirt. He was drunk. His swollen face was pathetic. Over his pink calico shirt he wore a vest, and across it hung a silver watch-chain with which he dallied lovingly. His ragged leather footwear was pulled over his bare feet. The boss was weak, feeble, sickly, puny, and infirm, just like his toil-worn, decrepit lathe. But the moment Zudin closed his eyes that seemed to be sticking together from fatigue, he would be abruptly awakened from the sweet dozing which the song of the belt wove as a spell, by the quick, rough blow of his master's fist on his back. And again the hot shavings would writhe

and twist, crawl to the floor and burn his bare feet.

"Work, you devil's doll! I'll show you how to sleep, you son of a ——! Just you dare to make less than thirty rolls, and I'll skin you alive!"

With its cobweb of infinitesimal dusty panes, a barred window frame, like a huge wall, separated this stuffy workroom from the rest of the world which spread out beyond somewhere, somewhere beyond the lathe. Once when the boss slept more soundly than usual after a drinking bout, Zudin turned the lever so that while the lathe did not stop, its operations ceased, and he looked to see what was going on at his side. There he saw a multitude of new clean, shining . . . not mere lathes, but holiday machines. All of them were singing in high thin voices, and around them walked a clean, decently-dressed man in a starched collar with a dove-grey necktie, a vest, trousers, and beautiful shoes—a neat master in a cap and with a cigar between his teeth. He turned the levers of one or of another machine and watched them throw piles of various merchandise out of their stomachs, pack them in smooth, uniform boxes, and pull them on a belt toward an exit and out

beyond the door.

"Whew! Look at it!" thought Zudin. "The boss himself is working! And just look how dexterously!"

But this was not the boss after all, because someone else came rolling in, fat, round, puffy, smooth-shaven, with a gleaming pince-nez and rings like rainbows on his short swollen fingers. The master in the vest and cap bent before him and reported something obsequiously. The puffy little man seemed satisfied. He shook his head gaily like a teetering, legless wooden doll with a round head and no neck, and, his pince-nez gleaming anew, he pointed to certain boxes in the corner. And then the master in the cap called loudly to someone. In response to his cry, a huge, moustached fellow, covered with soot and oil and wearing a long broad blue blouse, crawled out from under the singing lathes that buzzed like angry wasps. He opened the indicated box with a nail puller and tore off the delicate yellow cover. Then the puffy master, his rings and pince-nez glittering, took out a pile of packages, thick, shining, beautifully wrapped. He turned them over to the master in the cap, who bowed respectfully, shoving them hurriedly into the pockets of his

greasy trousers. The puffy master, grimacing unpleasantly, took out about five more packages and offered them unwillingly to the man in the blue blouse. Then, hurrying as fast as he could, he replaced the cover of the box and pulled it after him out of the door. The master in the cap and the fellow in the blue blouse opened their packages and bit into something inside.

What are they eating? Zudin wondered. The fellow in the blue blouse came up to him for some reason and stood with his back against the open wicket of his dusty glass wall. Zudin began to talk with him:

"What is your name, friend?"

"My name? Hans!"

"What are you eating here, something smooth in a shiny paper?"

"Ah-ah-ah! . . . Chocolate!"

"Oh, so that's it! Well, now, what does it taste like?"

"Doesn't your boss give you any?"

"No, I don't think that my boss even knows that there is such a thing as your chocolate. But I don't understand about you. Have you two bosses?"

"Well, let me see. How can I explain it to

you? You see, the fellow who gave me the chocolate, that's my boss. And that fellow over there in the cap is the foreman. But to tell you the truth, my dear boy, it's all the same to us."

"And yet you seem to live well. You are cleanly dressed, you wear shoes, you eat chocolate, and they don't beat you."

"They don't beat me? Well, how shall I put it? That happens once in a while, too. And as for the chocolate—what's so remarkable about that? It is very nutritious, it gives a lot of energy, but the main thing is that it is cheap. The boss economises on bread. Bread is very expensive. But he can import chocolate for next to nothing. He gets it from the Negroes in exchange for brass gods and glass beads. And sometimes, you know, he just takes it without paying for it. That's the way he feeds us. But you saw yourself how little of it he gives us. The dirty dog is afraid that I'll get too strong. And besides, you have no idea how greedy that fat balloon is! Do you think a package is enough for a man who does my kind of work? I can scarcely drag my legs. But he pulls away a full box for himself and gobbles it until he falls over, washing it down with champagne!" Hans looked round uneasily. "Do you know,

young fellow, at times it seems to me that you and I ought to come to some understanding, get together and choke all of our bosses."

"What are you saying! What are you saying!" Zudin exclaimed, jumping away from the window in fright.

"Hans!" cried the master in the cap. Hans walked away hastily.

"Hey, you little devil! Have you been asleep again?" the boss grumbled from his broken chair, rubbing his eyes. "Once more the lathe has been running without making anything! Ekh, you carrion!" And another blow of the fist sobered Zudin.

Again the corrosive shavings writhed, searing his feet that had turned green. The broken lathe trembled. There was a stuffy odour of mould. The irritated boss grumbled like dying thunder. There, beyond the glass wall, lathes and other machines sang like bees, the shadows of their flying belts flickering against another glass wall beyond which another swarm of the same kind of machines droned like a hive, and so on, and so on, without end.

It looks like a large factory, thought Zudin. Who is its boss?

But Zudin never saw the principal boss. In-

stead, he beheld a scene which pierced all his being and twisted his life like a waterspout.

The belt-drive hummed, the lathe trembled, the rustling shavings crept and crawled, his eyes stuck together in fatigue. Suddenly, in the yard above, something burst loudly and distinctly.

Dozing on his broken chair, the boss almost fell over at the unexpected explosion. He ran upstairs for all he was worth, his ragged shoes clattering noisily on the stone steps. Forsaking his lathe, Zudin ran after him.

In a spacious, stone-paved factory yard where piles of various boxes were stacked, a grey, dried-up man, pale and smooth-shaven, stood with his hands on his hips. The fat puffy neighbour-boss was writhing on the ground before him. He had been thrown down, and his cheek bore the red mark of a slap.

"Don't push yourself in where you're not supposed to go, my dear fellow! Don't touch somebody else's chocolate!" the man who stood over him growled ominously, gritting his teeth.

The eyes of the fat man were bloodshot, and white foam flecked his fat lips.

"Somebody else's? Ah, you bandit! You

can't tell me that it belongs to somebody else! Hans, help me!" And the fat man, jumping to his feet like a ball, caught Hans, who had appeared in response to the noise and was pushed forward by the master in the cap, and began dragging him by the neck. "Hans, hit him in his horse face! This scoundrel has just grabbed all your chocolate. Help me get it back!"

Hans turned crimson, swung back in confusion, and struck out with such vigour that the tall man swayed and was scarcely able to stand on his legs. Immediately the tall man put his fingers in his mouth and whistled piercingly. From every direction apparently all the inhabitants of this strange place came running to the scene of battle, swaying their heads and puffing like blacksmith bellows.

"What are you doing, Hans?" asked Zudin, in fright, pulling him timidly by the blouse. "Remember what you said yourself not so long ago? And now you are fighting for some chocolate!"

But Zudin did not have time to finish his speech. His own boss, his tangled beard trembling with his excitement, began to kick and scream, and sank his teeth into the shoulder of

the puffing fat man who was searching on the pavement for his pince-nez, broken in the course of the struggle. Just then someone from the crowd of those who had joined the fight later swooped down on the boss and kicked him in the back. He fell like a mattress to the ground, gnashing his teeth in rage and bellowing:

"Lout! Carrion! Why do you stand there like a sheep when your boss is being beaten? Police!" Doubled over with pain, he hit Zudin in the neck with both fists. Zudin stumbled and flew head first into the very thick of the free-for-all fight. He found himself in the midst of most unexpected, painful, and well-aimed blows which came from all sides in this chaos of gritting teeth, roars, and snarls. Everybody beat everybody else with anything he could lay his hands on. Striving to get himself out of this bloody mess, Zudin strained with all his boyish strength and began to fight his way out, biting and scratching with nails that were torn off by the blows. Someone smashed him on the side with one of the same rolls he made on his lathe; somebody else sank a sharp steel knife into his leg, while a third beat him furiously over the ear with a piece of wood that had nails

in it, probably a piece of the wooden chocolate box. Zudin was entirely overpowered. He fell under somebody's legs, lay helplessly in a fever of convulsions . . . and quite unexpectedly crawled out.

Several teeth had been knocked out, and they dangled from his gums. His hair was matted with the warm blood which oozed from his ears and cheeks. His whole body and all his bones ached unendurably, while his bare foot, crushed by someone's cast-iron boot, pulsed and throbbed in excruciating agony.

Am I still alive? This must be a dream! passed through his brain, while he crawled, groaning, to the stone stairway of his cellar. And in the middle of the yard the hundred-legged ball of fighting bodies with its hundred arms and hundred eyes rolled and twisted as before with the same furious roar and commotion.

In the meanwhile the fat neighbour-boss had somehow regained his feet and stood near his door, puffing, showering saliva in his excitement, and bandaging his hand. His opponent, the tall man, with yellow, horse-like teeth, leaned against his own door, peacefully tying his torn shoelaces. All about were scattered pieces of lathes, parts of machines, broken in-

struments, thrown there no one knew by whom or whence. Lighted boxes blazed brightly—boxes in which chocolate bubbled and hissed—and the hot flames flickered on the faces of the bosses.

Who is fool enough to fight on such an occasion? Zudin wondered. His boss, hobbling painfully, crawled out of his cellar, carrying all his tools and other early possessions—all that he had so carefully hidden in his closet from Zudin—and threw them into the battle. His vest had been slashed by something sharp, he had a black eye, one of his ragged shoes was gone, and the broken silver watch-chain dangled pathetically from a buttonhole.

“Where are you going, you lousy dog, you traitor, you Judas!” he shouted hoarsely at Zudin. “Go back, or I’ll kill you this minute!” And he flung a drill at him. “Will you obey me now?”

Zudin was silent. He could not comprehend anything. *Who is fighting?*

“Crawl back, you puppy! Grab your hammer and march back immediately, or I’ll tear you to pieces myself, you spawn of Herod!” cried the boss, shaking with fury.

“That’s the way to treat him, that’s the

way!" the tall man ground out between clenched teeth.

"That's enough! Stop egging him on!" hissed the neighbour-boss, the fat one.

Zudin crumpled under a new blow, rolled back down the sharp stone stairs into his cellar, where in the darkness he felt his hammer on the mucky floor under his hand. He seized it quickly and pressed it between his legs.

Must I suffer for ever? Is there no way out? He tried to lie without stirring, but the crooked fingers of someone's long, sinewy hand felt for his broken shoulder, seized him and dragged him out into the yard, like cabbage out of the soup.

"Here he is, that good-for-nothing of yours! Just look at him!" said the tall, smooth-shaven boss who had finished tying his shoe, dropping Zudin from his claws. Then he pushed him head first into the ragged boot of his boss and turned away.

"Ah-ha! So you tried to run away! So you are on *his* side!" Zudin's boss roared hoarsely, having apparently lost his voice from exhaustion, tossing his head in the direction of the fat man. His little beard, parts of which had been torn out in the fight, revealing his lacerated,

filthy neck, shook with his foaming anger. "So this is what you're trying to do!" And he swung at Zudin with a coupling bolt.

Zudin, dodged, leaned over, shut his eyes, swung his hammer and struck out with it. Something yelped pitifully like a dog, dropped with a terrible cry, buried its teeth into his bare feet and, winding around him like a hoop, rolled with him down all the stone steps into the cellar. The boss fought furiously but weakly. Zudin's hammer struck at his temple near the left eye; blood spurted out and poured down his face.

"Let me go!" cried Zudin.

"No! I will not let you go! I shall die, but I shall choke you to death first, you accursed one!" The boss was so hoarse that Zudin could scarcely hear him. He threw himself on Zudin like a mass of lead, crushing his feet. Zudin tried wildly to pull himself away. The boss twitched, and again flung himself forward convulsively. Then, scattering with his feet the remains of the lathe that now was altogether broken, he sighed helplessly, dropped his head, and collapsed like spilled soup.

Zudin rose slowly, swaying on his feet. All his body was racked in agony from the blows

and wrenches, from the wounds and the loss of blood. The teeth that had been knocked out dangled in his mouth from torn bits of blanched gums. Torturing pain spread a fog before his eyes, but, supporting himself with trembling fingers on the scattered articles, he began to crawl slowly out into the air. Something fell from its place and rolled under his feet down on his boss. He looked around. The remnants of the broken lathe below looked black, like a skeleton that had been gnawed at. Near it, in mud and blood, lay the corpse of his boss, his legs sprawled wide apart. Under the ceiling the silent transmission pulley stuck out, bereft of the belt, which had jumped off.

Everything is lost. I don't suppose I can fix it all myself. Where will I go? How will I eat? I can't go to my neighbour.

He stooped and mechanically picked up a bar of chocolate that had been crushed under-foot by someone. How it happened to be there he did not know but, without thinking, he thrust it into his pocket.

The thought of Hans pierced his brain, like sharp violet lightning. *Is it possible that he is still fighting there like a fool, for the pleasure of his loathsome boss? Are all of them, all the*

fellows in blue blouses, the hungry idiots who are piled together in that hoarse mêlée, still chipping one another's befuddled skulls with chisels, still tearing out one another's eyes with pincers for the sake of this damned chocolate which they have scarcely seen and the remains of which are thrown to them by their masters like bones to dogs? Why shouldn't they unite now and take advantage of the fight, throw themselves on their masters with heavy hammers, chisels, and nail-pullers, and crack open the flat skulls of those beasts who kick them to the lathes and under the bellies of machines with their fashionable patent-leather boots? Then won't they have all the chocolate for themselves, to eat, or not, as they please?

Even as he thought of it, Zudin felt the sweet taste in his mouth. He stood in the doorway that overlooked the yard, and saw the same black, writhing bundle of humanity covered with dirt and blood, filthy muscular bodies screaming and groaning with pain, twisting like a pile of crabs dumped together into a narrow basket.

"Hans!" he shouted with all his might. And he was surprised at the resonance of his boyish voice.

The puffy neighbour-boss, his leaden eyes rolling with horror, stepped back toward his door, spreading out his fingers before Zudin's face as if protecting himself from a horrible spectre.

"Murderer! Murderer!" he whispered. "Away from me! Away from me! Bind him! Don't listen to him! He is a murderer! He is insane!"

One of the other bosses, the long-legged smooth-shaven one who had tied his shoes, spat contemptuously through his teeth.

"Filthy *canaille*; disgusting pup! You've pulled a nasty, dirty little trick because you are a damned fool. Your boss was not a bad gentleman, and he used to supply me with excellent hubs."

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"Yes, he used to supply me with excellent hubs, amazingly cheap. In a word, he was a splendid boss, and all his life he worried only about you. Often he used to beg chocolate from me, but, to tell the truth, the poor fellow didn't get very much. His pathetic merchandise was very cheap, amazingly cheap. And besides, I received the major part of it free, in payment of power. Or do you, you brainless

frog, think that transmission is turned on free of charge for you numskulls by some kind-hearted devil? He was a very good and God-fearing boss. Before long he could have become, if you please, a man among men," the long-legged one continued, as if thinking aloud, and accenting his words with the nods of his head. "Yes, a man among men, if this brainless mongrel had not put a hole in his head with his fool's hammer. Do you realise that I promised your boss two whole boxes of chocolate, and had even opened the gate for him to receive it ahead of time? Just think, you ass, how you have destroyed something which was to your own advantage! Still, I am not vengeful. We shall remain friends, and I shall immediately order your transmission to be turned on, if you stop raising a rumpus and . . . Do you know what? I'll give you a whole box of chocolate if you won't listen to anyone but me, and fix this wild boar's belly with your little knife." And he nodded in the direction of the fat boss.

"What is that old horse saying? No, don't you listen to the lies of that giraffe who has lost his mind! Listen, you good-for-nothing," shouted the other, stretching his bandaged hand

toward Zudin. "Don't believe that crook! I'll give you five whole boxes after this fight, if you'll only take your hammer and knock the teeth out of that crazy mare!"

But Zudin did not listen. Gritting his teeth with pain, and slowly dragging his swollen leg, he stubbornly approached the crowd of workers, his bruised eyes shining.

"Brothers! What are you doing? Come to your senses! Hans, and all you other unfortunates! Look here, go after those who got you into this fight. Beat your bosses over the head. Then we shall have all the chocolate and bread we want, and our skulls won't be broken any more! Don't lose time! You have iron wedges in your hands now! Look out! Tomorrow will be too late. The bosses will harness you to the lathes as soon as you are disunited! Hans, Hans, listen to me! Don't you know me? Don't you remember that long ago you yourself taught me revenge against the bosses? Look! Now I am free! I listened to you and I have killed my slave driver!"

Zudin's screaming, heart-rending cry pierced the ears of the fighters like a whistle, but like the whistle with which they were familiar to the point of nausea—the whistle of their fac-

tories—it did not rouse them, not one of them, with its worn-out, hackneyed words. Only the final tortured cry, “I have killed my slave driver!” sank into the pile like water poured into a puddle, and stirred its muddy depths. It seemed as if some unseen force had caught all of the fighters at once by their elbows. Hans, puffing like a boiler, made his way backward out of the pile and was the first to respond to the call of the little boy. One of his trouser legs had been ripped off during the fight, and his bare, hairy leg, covered with purple and yellow bruises and running ribbons of blood, trembled with pain and exhaustion.

“What have you started, you little rogue?” He looked at Zudin in perplexity, gasping for breath, and smearing his snivels and sweat with his filthy hands.

“Don’t listen to him, Hans! Don’t listen!” his fat boss cried hysterically, crawling on all fours. “Can’t you see that he’s crazy? Can’t you see that he’s a fool, an utter, hopeless fool? He has killed his good boss and has broken up the whole shop! Hans, can’t you see that he is a mad barbarian? He’s a savage! My God, what shall I do?” he cried in utter despair as Hans paid little attention to him.

"The boss is speaking the honest truth, my dear Hans," the master in the cap said suddenly in a sharp, loud voice, licking his fingers as he crawled unexpectedly out of the shop. "This trash doesn't understand a thing about Socialism. Socialism, Communism, and the expropriation of our good, kind bosses, my dear Hans, are possible only when machines have entirely replaced human labour. That's one condition. Or when our bosses stop giving us any chocolate at all. That's the second condition. Then the worker will take both the chocolate and the machines. This, dear Hans, was said by our great teacher Marx in his third volume." And, wiping his hands against his pants, the master started to pull a fat little red book out of his pocket.

"He is lying, Hans. He is lying," Zudin screamed frantically. "Can't you feel that this cannot be the truth? Can't you see that this strong chain of vicious spiders must be broken as soon as possible, while there are still weak links in it, or . . . or . . . we shall all choke in their cobweb! And what's more, we shall all destroy one another!"

"Where is it written? Show it to me!" said Hans, advancing upon his master.

"Wait a minute! Give me time to take it out. Can't you see it is stuck in there? Do you expect me to cut my pocket for you just because you are in a hurry? Can't you see for yourself with your own mind? Well, if you don't believe me, go ahead and follow the example of this mealy-mouthed idiot. But why don't you ask him where his lathe is? How is he going to work now with his broken lathe? Stop it, Hans! Don't be a fool! Look, they have broken the hands of our boss! And why? Because he wanted to get an extra box of chocolate just to share it with you! Or are you going to tell me that you don't get chocolate? All right! Go ahead, break up your shop and put yourself in slavery to that horse-face!"

Hans hesitated in pitiful indecision, the bulging whites of his eyes gazing wildly at all of the speakers. In the meanwhile the fight had petered out. Everybody tried to listen to the argument. The blows fell slower and less frequently, and only a pair of petty squabblers, growling, gripped somebody's thighs tenaciously with their teeth. Unnoticed, the master in the cap approached Hans and finished his speech by shoving him toward his fat boss with a quick, dexterous movement. The boss

grasped Hans firmly by the hands and disappeared with him into the shop, followed by the master in the cap who tumbled after them, reeling under a vicious blow by the smooth-shaven lanky boss. The yard was empty. Each boss quickly seized his own workmen and, taking the tools from them, chased them back into his shop with punches and oaths.

Zudin took a deep breath. He was frightened. Everyone had gone. He was alone. *The thing has failed! They have fooled everybody! And at home is a broken lathe and the boss I have killed. Wherein was my mistake? Wherein did I fail? Where have I stumbled?*

"I know! . . . I know! . . . I know! . . ." he cried out resonantly, joyously, as if he had fired a gun into the sky. "I know everything now! This . . . this is chocolate! . . . Chocolate! . . . Chocolate! . . ." And, forgetting his pain, he began to run forward with all his might, limping with his crushed foot like a wounded hare.

Faster, faster, faster! Forward now to meet the tremendous, indifferent yellow sun! Now he would take the sweet bait away from the slave drivers! He would take the chocolate away from them! He, Zudin, knew everything

now! No one would ever fool him again!

Behind a long, high, endless fence he heard voices, guttural, incomprehensible, as if several people were gargling their throats. He saw a gate with a sign and went in. As far as his eye could reach, he saw endless rows of flat, open, broad wooden boxes, that resembled seed beds at first glance and in which lay brown pods. Near the boxes a multitude of utterly naked people, with enormous black bodies that shone as if covered with grease, sat on their haunches and exchanged broken guttural sounds. The whites of their eyes, like doves' eggs, and their teeth that seemed to have been made of ivory, seemed artificial, like bright toys against the soft background of brown eyelids and full lips, red as barberries. Here were young men and women, decrepit old people with grey hair, and small children who ran around like cockroaches, swaying on their thin little legs, their paunchy stomachs protruding like pears. With long sticks all these people continually turned over the brown pods which, on closer sight, appeared to be as fat as cucumbers. At the same time another shift, armed with small crooked knives on long sticks, brought more of these pods in round woven baskets, which they

carried on their heads from near-by trees with brown, withered leaves.

The sun beat down on them; salty sweat dripped from their black necks and shoulders. But the workers never straightened their bent, strong backs, and their arms moved faster than ever when their eyes, which gleamed white and naked under overhanging brows, caught sight of a stately blond beast with soft pink cheeks and gay, stubbornly cruel eyes, like the grey sea of the distant north. Under his saddle pranced a playful chestnut horse. A broad white hat cast an opalescent shadow on his face. A thin, snow-white cambric shirt was turned up over the rosy dimples of his muscular arms. From the pocket of his brown leather trousers bulged the handle of a Colt revolver. And a thin graceful whip, perfumed with opopanax, dangled at the wrist of this handsome fellow, and from time to time cracked out in gay, airy loops, sinking its thin steel tip into the black body of a dozing Negro.

"Oh, no, master! My lord, thy slave is working diligently for thy joy! Don't beat me! Take pity on me, my lord, in thy kingdom!"

But the master, his bold, alert face shining like the sun, smiled and moved slowly on, with-

out even listening, without even looking. Then the prostrate slave timidly turned the glowing embers of his eyes after his master, ground his teeth together, and roared like a beast. With fear and secret hope, the others gazed with burning eyes at his gesture of defiance, but it passed and vanished as foam breaks from the crest of a green wave and is lost.

"Is your brother in pain?" Zudin asked tenderly, sitting down beside them. "Is your brother weary?"

But the Negro, bristling with suspicion and fear, was silent.

"Brother, you should not fear me. I am not the master, although my face is white, even as his. I am the irreconcilable enemy of the master. I shall kill him and you will be free. We shall throw his revolver into the river! We shall tear his whip to pieces! You will no longer have to drag and turn his accursed pods. You know that from these beans, fat with your sweat and bitter with your tears, they make sweet things for their own pleasure, sweet things that they call chocolate?"

The Negro nodded his head. His confidence grew, but then he made a wry face and asked:

"But who will give us these wonderful

things, then?" And he pointed to the necklace of thick blue beads which hung on his black, sweaty chest.

Zudin smiled bitterly. "We'll make better ones for you, better and bigger! But tell me, don't you want freedom? And if you want it, come, let us talk it over with our brothers. Let us agree on the holy sign at which all of us will throw ourselves like beasts upon that grey-eyed knave with the revolver! And then I will bring you many, many blue, lilac, and azure beads—the kind you like—and I will take nothing from you. I don't eat your chocolate!" And Zudin nodded emphatically.

The Negro cried out and leapt joyously like a little rabbit. A strange gay sound clicked in his throat and ran like a charge of electricity through the black rows where a thousand glistering eyes gleamed like beetles, staring at him, at Zudin, the puny little boy who had been beaten.

How quickly I've done it! How easily and quickly I have succeeded! he thought joyfully. And he saw that something terribly important, something that had never before happened in the world, was going to happen here and now. And after that all the greedy slave drivers of

the north would have to beat their heads against the walls of their deserted counters. There would be no more chocolate, the one thing that they needed most, that was most important to them, the thing whereby they lived. There would be no more chocolate!

"Then you are not the master?" the Negro repeated with joy and amazement, clicking his tongue. "You don't eat chocolate? You are one of us? Then you will come with us! We shall climb our trees together, plucking nuts, laughing and playing our games. We shall sleep by the stream on the silken stalks of long grass, hidden from the heat of the red sun. And in the evenings, under the dove-grey spicy haze of the marsh fog, we shall pray together fervently, passionately, to the beautiful, mysterious beads. You will give them to us, won't you? Will you give them to us? But you promised!" And thousands of crystalline trusting eyes gazed at him with their childish plea. Hundreds of caressing hands stroked him, touched him lovingly, crept into his pocket.

"He is a master! He has deceived us! . . . Chocolate!"

Zudin did not understand. They pointed their fingers at him accusingly. Then all of

them bent lower and more submissively than ever, and began to work as busily as mice, as the stately, handsome man who cast an opalescent shadow over his horse passed slowly by.

What has happened? And he saw a Negro before him, twirling between his fingers in confusion the piece of chocolate he had accidentally pulled from Zudin's pocket.

Ah, so that's it! flashed through Zudin's mind. But he had no time to think more. Like a nut, his skull was cracked with a ringing blow, and his listless body with broken bones that tore through the flesh and skin was shoved into a low rough box with the bitter odour of withered pods.

PART V

LIKE acid, alarm corrodes the heart of Vasily Shcheglov, turning within him like a drill. His pleasant, far-away childhood, lost to him for ever, shines in the distance like bits of bright glass and brushes his eyes with the warm green leaf of a blooming, fragrant elder tree. Under it scamper dusty childish feet, and fat yellow butterflies flutter around it. The sun-burned, large-eyed face of Alyoshka is thoughtful. Vasya's heart beats desolately, like a lonely sunflower seed in the dangling pockets of his torn trousers.

The small iron bar is heavy, and the corners are sharp. It is difficult to grasp it in the palm of his hand. Oh, if it were only smooth! *Will I miss again? Will we lose the game now?* But Alyoshka's little hand pushes Vasya, and his voice encourages him playfully: "Steady, Vasya. Here . . . You're winning! . . ."

And now as if Shustry, or a whole regiment of Shustrys, twist their long fingers at Alyoshka

like spiders, he, Vasya, will not betray Alyoshka. The far-away youth, the elder tree, and the game they played pass before Vasya's eyes, and he is more determined than ever . . .

Rapidly, in a cool tenor voice, Stepan asked something and, squinting, silently pointed his pencil at the electric lamp. Quickly and with assurance, Vasya pondered one weighty thought after another, like a cat gathering his hind feet for a jump at a mouse that is frozen with terror.

Quite unexpectedly, Shustry's croaking voice broke the tension:

"Will you permit me——"

"Ekh, we've had enough of you!" Vasya cried, his face turning hot and red. "We've had enough of you! You've barked enough! Do you mean to say that I don't know Zudin? I've known Alyoshka for a long time. We've been comrades since childhood. He is absolutely straight! He is one of us in every respect. In a word——"

"Do you mean to say that I've been libelling him?" Shustry interrupted.

"Take your turn," Stepan said ominously. "We'll give Shustry another five minutes, but he must stick to essentials." He turned sud-

denly to the open-mouthed secretary. "Are you putting everything down?"

The secretary hastily wiped his sweaty hand on his trousers, and again his pencil ran frantically across the paper. Shustry, bristling like a swallow, continued his tirade about the party meetings which Zudin had failed to attend . . . about the factory which had been forgotten by the erstwhile worker, Zudin . . . about the present unrest in the workers' quarters. . . .

So that is what he is driving at, the pest! Vasily thought to himself.

"Wait a minute! . . ."

"Don't interrupt," Stepan stopped him.

Shustry, thus encouraged, smiled victoriously and turned to his brief case. He fidgeted in it with the pretentious care of a physician's assistant in a village, who, while the doctor is washing his hands after an autopsy, potters about in the belly, putting the insides in their proper places and thinking to himself, "We must have order, order. After all, I cannot place the heart under the intestines." In a similar manner Shustry would not permit himself to be swayed from his purpose. He exposed all the wiles, all the subterfuges, of the insidious Zudin. He, Shustry, took pride in the confidence he com-

manded. He knew how numerous were the enemies of the working class, people who were eager to get into the party, where, clinging to their party ticket, they acted as intermediaries for those who wanted to dirty the water and stir up all kinds of filth . . . but Shustry would clean it all up.

“ ‘Comrade!’ ‘Party Member!’ ” he jeered in a ringing voice. “And yet he hadn’t paid his monthly dues for half a year! . . . And this was the beginning of his downfall: Pavlov and Valts . . . and the Socialist-Revolutionaries at Osennikovo . . . And none of this was accidental. And it is no accident that our chairman of the Cheka turned the entire Cheka into a cesspool!” And Shustry twitched his close-cropped grey moustache contemptuously.

A cesspool? Vasya Shcheglov listened; his kindly eyes saw again the broken bits of bright glass gleaming in the sun, the white blossoms of his childhood’s elder tree, and his heart grew soft and warm.

Shustry stormed and raged, noting secretly that Shcheglov was dreaming, his mouth half open, paying no attention to the thing that lay before them there like a solid iron wall barring the path of the party’s problems. And Shustry

drilled on relentlessly, stabbing and piercing Shcheglov's tender compassion with the steel jabs of his sharpened words.

"... Do you think that the White Guards are utter idiots, that they were satisfied just to give the wine and the candy, and that they did not find out—through the very same Hackey whom Valts shielded and Zudin disregarded—do you think that they did not ferret out all the business secrets of the Cheka? After all, Zudin had absolute confidence in Valts! And thus Zudin entrusted secrets to the enemy! For that alone is it not enough to shoot him? And yet if you look in this direction! . . ." and Shustry's black eyes stung Shcheglov. "A straight fellow' . . . 'in every respect'? . . . No! We entrusted him with the responsibility of our sword, and he has sullied it with bribes and criminal confidences! Now he is guilty of everything! That Zudin! He is guilty of everything! . . . Yes, guilty even of those tortured corpses!" And Shustry, his brows bristling, pointed toward the sweating dark windows. ". . . Yes, those mashed and bloody corpses of our fighting heroes! And our staunch comrades, who are dying now because of Zudin, dying in tremendous numbers, right now at

this very minute, at the gates of the city, not twenty-five versts away! . . . Yes, and only Zudin is guilty of all this! It is his negligence which made this uprising possible! . . . I am not even convinced—" and here Shustry deftly threw his brief case from one side to the other—"I am not even certain that we shall be able to last until morning! Our reserve forces are negligible! . . . And shall we surrender this city?" He flung up his fists, displaying hairy emaciated arms. ". . . Zudin must be—immediately—and mercilessly—shot!!"

The red cloth on the table seemed to absorb even the sharpest words; the men were silent and gazed upon it as if by mutual agreement.

"You have the floor, Shcheglov."

"I tell you . . ." His voice trembled. He rose nervously. One hand quivered through his hair, while the other twisted and tugged helplessly at the black cord of his belt. "I tell you . . . yes, I tell you that there is nothing lower than all this gossip! . . ." But under the knife-like gaze of Stepan, Vasya's sharp cry wavered. "... Never in my life have I seen such a thing, such treatment as is accorded our old comrade! Zudin a bribe taker? How was it proven? I'll lay my head on it that he is not! I have known Alyosh-

ka ever since he was a little lad, and he has never changed! . . . He is charged with not having attended the meeting of his party cell and of the Soviet! Think of it! What a crime! After all, isn't the business of the Cheka more important? And besides, as chairman of the Provincial Cheka, he was always at the meetings of the Provincial Committee. Why hasn't Comrade Shustry, as an 'objective' investigator, mentioned a word about that? And since when has work in the Cheka ceased to be party work, and what is more, the most important kind of party work? Think of it now . . . meetings! Then what was he doing in the Cheka? Playing blind-man's-buff?"

"Playing around with women!" Tkacheyev suggested, quietly but distinctly.

". . . With women? . . . With women! . . . Oh, comrades, these women are shady business—bad business! And the devil only knows what made him take pity on that little bitch! I don't understand how she touched him. I simply can't grasp it. From our point of view we have no use for such young ladies. She's just a lacy spittle, not a human being. The devil only knows what happened between them, whether he was really intimate with her or not. And it

seems to me that it's perfectly useless to touch upon that aspect of the case. That's their own affair. A bitch, as everybody knows, will remain a bitch. It is a pity, of course, that he was sorry for her. That woman got the poor fellow into trouble. But I don't see that Alyoshka is at fault before us in any way. Well, I grant you that he did make a bit of a mistake, that he slipped up. But who among us is without sin? He has remained to the very end a loyal fighter, a faithful scout. And a scout is always ahead, always loses connection with the mass, and because of that he may make mistakes. But does that make him guilty? Is it his fault? Have we the right to shoot him for that? Why, he is full of revolutionary strength. He's a whole mountain of strength! Yet Shustry cries that we must shoot such a man! No, comrades, I know we won't do anything of the kind. We Bolsheviks must not do such a thing! If you like, let's transfer him to another city, give him another job, bring him closer to the workers. With that I agree. . . . But as for Shustry—"and Shcheglov, shaking his head, dug his fingernails into the table cloth—"as for Shustry, I propose that for his untruthful twisting of facts he should be immediately turned over to the

party court!"

Shustry jumped to his feet. "May I have the floor?"

"I won't give the floor to personal issues," Stepan cut him decisively. "It's your own fault . . ."

Shustry raised his brows until they seemed petrified in wonder.

"... Of course, your duty is easy," continued Shcheglov. "All you have to do is dig up all sorts of villainy, and you have become accustomed to seeing downright scoundrels or heavenly heroes everywhere. That is why you have developed all sorts of 'evil wills,' 'justice,' and similar Philistine hallucinations. You have even begun to talk about mass terror! You would be much more useful if the Central Committee were to transfer you to another type of work. Don't worry, it would be to your own best interests."

Stepan looked at both of them thoughtfully.

"And so?"

At this point, slowly, wearily, Tkacheyev raised his eyelids. Shcheglov suddenly felt desolate and chilly, as one who watches an advancing storm cloud weave its way forward like grey smoke, leaden, irrevocable. It covers all

the sky ominously, and one cannot tell if it will quench the thirst of the quiet fields with a noisy downpour, or lash their hidden greed with the clatter of jumping hail. And it seemed to Shcheglov that he was caught in the storm, bent over like a rabbit with nowhere to hide, and that the hail of Tkacheyev's words danced on his head unerringly and harshly.

"... Yes, they're both wrong. Neither Shcheglov nor Shustry has actually penetrated into the essence of the case. Shustry himself has just admitted that Zudin was caught by a woman, by the lace of a drivelling cocotte, poisonous and bright like a toadstool. But Zudin took pity on her. He was sorry for the delicate hot-house parasite that had been fed on our sweat and blood. He did not want her to perish, you see, this tender exquisiteness that is cut from the same horsehide as our peasant boots. He took pity on her against us, and—*he* perished. *There* is the point."

Tkacheyev tore the end of the piece of paper that lay before him, poured some *makhorka* into it from his pouch, and rolled a cigarette. He waited for the blue stench of the glowing match to burn out, lit the cigarette, and began to smoke.

"The last few days, Stepan and I have been going through all the factories," he continued, spreading thick clouds of smoke about him like a steamship. "They won't let us talk. They chase us out and yell, 'Gentlemen Commissars! Here you come to us in our factories like a general used to come to his city! Where were you before you came here? Were you eating chocolate? Where is that Zudin of yours? Bring him here! Give him to us! We'll fix him! We don't get our one-eighth of a pound every day, and he has chocolate! Our children are dying of cold and starvation, and he is with a ballet dancer dressed in silks! Why do you defend him? Do you all hang together? We won't believe you until you exterminate this filthy wretch! We don't believe you! We don't believe you! And we won't go anywhere! Choke on your chocolate!' This is what all the workers are crying. You say it's demagogy? Backward masses? But I think they are right! Did he take the chocolate? He did! Now try and *prove* that it wasn't a bribe! Did he take it from a White Guard woman? He certainly did not take it from one of us, from a Bolshevik woman. And you can't fool them. They can tell by her face that she is one of those fine

young ladies and they know what she stands for! And the whole city knows about it! All the Red Army men, all the factories, everybody knows about it! Suppose you go, Shcheglov, and explain to them that all of this is just a little error, a mere trifle. Go on, and talk to the workers. Persuade them to go to the front—for if they don't, the city will fall. Well, never mind the workers for a moment. Try to persuade even our rank-and-file party comrades! Try to convince them at least that Zudin did not take any gold. If he didn't, where is it? This is why the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks are sniffing the air. They are drawn to carrion. Just think of it! In the Soviet, in *our* Soviet, they have raised the question of dissolving the Cheka! And at what a moment! Think of it! And do you know, Shcheglov, that a good part of our Communists have voted for it, not to mention the non-partisans? What do you say to that? Or would you say that this is why we are Bolsheviks, and that we must convince and convert everybody? Where? How? And besides, what will you go round explaining? Zudin is not guilty because so and so, and thus and thus, he was a single-handed fighter, a scout . . . Here

you've started your 'not guilty,' but in that case, who is guilty of anything, I ask you? No one is guilty of anything! Neither you, nor I, nor Kolchak, nor Denikin! Well, and what of it? We can continue committing villainies 'in our innocence,' and the factories and the Red Army will keep quiet: we are not guilty, you see. No, my dear fellow. It won't work. We don't give a damn about the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks, and the whole swarm of calumniators. But to spit on the opinion of our workers, our soldiers—that's too much, brother. We cannot separate ourselves from them. Say what you like, and as much as you like—that they are ignorant, that they have a petty bourgeois heritage, that they don't understand a thing in politics—you can rattle on about anything you like, but you don't dare to separate yourself from them, not even by that much, because you have taken upon yourself the burden of the world and are pulling the whole class after you. And it's not for nothing that they have all raised their hands against Zudin. If he had been part and parcel of the masses of workers—don't try to fool yourself, brother—he would not have been drawn to silk stockings. When once you have

blended your life with the workers, they're always on the lookout, they're always watching you, and they see your work, because it is as if it were under a bell of glass. And this is what convinces them better than the best of your propaganda."

"What do you propose, then?" Vasya Shcheglov whispered apprehensively.

"What do I propose? In the first place, we cannot turn back that which cannot be turned back, that which is no more. Now is not the time to go around convincing and persuading anybody. You can't do it. All our comrades are on fighting sectors; our enemies are closing in. We must rouse all the workers immediately and fling them into the battle. If we don't, the city is lost. And there's no use philosophising about it. We cannot discuss now the fact, let us say, that he was at one time a good comrade. If he has stumbled in a fundamental, and thereby wrought confusion in our ranks, in our solidarity with the masses of workers—there is only one way out! The blood of the working class is more precious to us than the blood of one man."

Shustry nodded his head vigorously. Vasya Shcheglov shivered like a bird wet by an

autumn rain, and his sharp little nose became sharper than ever. Puckering his lips, Stepan wrote something hurriedly on a piece of paper, folded it, and beckoning to Shustry, gave it to him and whispered something in his ear. Shustry ran out importantly. Vasya shrank from the icy draught that blew through the open door.

"Yes, he got himself into a hell of a hole," Shcheglov faltered. "Still, it is possible not to kill him, but to do it some other way . . ."

"What other way?" asked Stepan, not understanding.

"Well, like this, for instance: Suppose we announce that we've shot him, and then smuggle him out abroad to do underground work farther away—well, let's say in America, for example."

"Do you want to fool the party?" Stepan smiled viciously. "No, Comrade Vasily, we don't play politics. We must not hide anything. We must set the party an example in this case."

"In other words, you're worrying about what the Princess Maria Alexeyevna or some other rank outsider will say," Vasya Shcheglov spat out.

Stepan froze. His face filled with blood, and he smashed his fist against the table with such force that a pencil jumped up and fell to the floor.

"Absolutely not! Not Maria Alexeyevna or any rank outsider, but the party! Yes, our party! We will permit no trifling here. We must take this living example, no circles, no diagrams, no theories, and throw it in their eyes to show the party whither our idealism leads. 'Single-handed fighters?' If you are a single-handed fighter, don't forget your connection with the rest of the class! Otherwise you will rely on 'high integrity' and 'a critical mind,' and you will forget the skimped little kopek, the workers-peasants' mite!"

And as Stepan continued, it seemed to Vasya Shcheglov that lines and lines of these countless skimped little kopeks floated and swirled about him like leaves in September. . . .

The peasant groans at his plough; with a hairy hand as heavy as a lump of earth, he wipes the itching drops of sweat from his neck. And in his dreams, the peasant watches the ripe grain sway, hears the full seeds rustle in the threshing machine, and stares at the sacks, taut and full. And when the market takes away

the products of his soil and a strange hand grasps a pile of his brown kopeks, a grudging pain strikes his heart: *Taxes, taxes, where do you go?*

In a dirty coat covered with grease, a workman runs around his lathes. Here he turns a screw, there a lever. In his ears is a constant clatter and clanking, and the lathes pour forth an endless rattling rain of sharp nails. Neatly boxed, these nails give birth to sacks of coppers. But the worker knows that to-morrow is pay day and he must pay his debts, and again nothing will remain. His wife will bicker with him, sick of making the best of things, and will angrily shove a dried-up piece of bread into his box for to-morrow. And slowly masticating it with his teeth and the saliva of his tongue, so as to prolong the pleasure of the odorous black bread, the worker will think: *Are all these nails worth only this crust? But what becomes of the rest?*

They swim and swirl like fallen leaves in September, these countless rows of skimmed, pathetic kopeks. They stick together in brown, viscous piles. They rise to the sky like clouds. They thicken into mountains, become hard, and suddenly sink into hulks of granite brood-

ing over the darkness of asphalt. But the darkness runs and plays in the reflections from the plate-glass windows of stores. Silks glisten in the show windows. Behind the glass of the window panes, champagne glasses ring. Storms of music float in ribbons into the street. A man in a fashionable woollen coat, with a white scarf and a fragrant flower in his buttonhole, carelessly inhales the aroma of a cigarette, and tenderly assists into the lacquered body of his automobile something that rustles delicately under muffling furs. "Oh, *mon Dieu*, we've forgotten to buy the chocolate! It's so stimulating. . . ."

Explosions of pitiful, skimped sharp kopeks roar angrily as they swirl like fallen leaves. . . . *Let's take them away! Let's take them away!* . . . They click against plaster. They ring out against windows with the sound of broken glass. They clang and thunder like iron over roofs. The resounding streets are empty. Behind a plate-glass show window pierced by the round fingers of shots are tin plates of unsalted peas, and a herring, turned yellow with age. The meagre, gnawed bloody kopeks shrink, diminish, become thin in the endless struggle for them. The gnarled fingers of the

worker make a new hole in his belt with his leather punch: he must pull it tighter. Unwillingly he looks at the peasant's field. Ekh, if he could only fight his way out!

And Vasya dreamed that he saw those skimped hard kopeks chasing each other, flying more densely than ever in storms and processions. Swirling into a winding mass, they will ring out like steel giants on the cement dikes of harnessed rivers. They will thunder through mains, bringing bright light to all the world, and warmth, and miraculous power for the rows of machines that will sing and shine in luxurious mirrored palaces. Rows of gay obedient machines will outdo themselves in producing things for the use of all; they will pile up huge heaps of excellent wool, shoes, soups and meat, silks, chocolate and porcelain, cloth, perfumes and macaroons, velvet and delicate batiste. And strong, rosy-cheeked boys and girls will run out from athletic fields, singing lusty songs about how people have built a new world of Communism with the narrow, bloody, skimped kopeks that belong to no one! . . .

Vasya Shcheglov watched for what seemed an eternity, but it was only a moment. There

was a subdued rattling of glass, threatening, menacing. Through the black windows a bluish dawn was already creeping. Stepan was still stubbornly cutting the air with the pencil that he clutched firmly in his hand.

"... And if one of us should forget about these kopeks, if one of us should weaken now in the struggle for all this beauty and sweetness that may come from these bloody pennies, these pennies converted in the past by parasites into wasteful luxury, then that one has rotted! If there is still time, save him, dip him into the midst of the very humblest strata of workers. But when there is no time, strike! If you don't, all our cause, all our great cause and struggle, will perish!"

Shcheglov sighed wearily. "Nevertheless, I am sorry for Zudin." His voice broke. "Oh, if you only knew, comrades, how sorry I am for Zudin!"

Something snapped in Stepan's hands. The quiet Tkacheyev suddenly rose and tore at the collar of his shirt. A button flew off and clicked against the floor.

"You are sorry? And what about us? Do you think that we—" and his glance pierced all of them—"do you think that we are not

sorry? Do you know, Shcheglov . . .” The words strangled in Tkacheyev’s throat. He lurched heavily forward, knocking over the stool, and grasped Shcheglov’s limp shoulders. His beard swayed like a black cloud split by the broad lightning of his yellow teeth. His heavy lids rose like trapdoors, and the smouldering fire of his eyes burst into flame. “. . . Ekh, Shcheglov! . . . Anyone of us here would gladly stand up against the wall for our comrade. But would that help anybody? Would that save us from the Whites? Can you rid the workers’ huts from the blood and groaning of mad, insane oppression with that? Are you sorry for him, for him alone? And what of all the others, all the rest? Aren’t you sorry for them? What shall we do about them? Have you forgotten them? . . .”

And suddenly the drowsy warmth of the elder tree faded and passed from Shcheglov’s mind. A conflagration of crackling beams roared before him, the clatter of breaking windows and the stifled cry of violated women.

The bluish windows rattled again. Stepan lifted his head.

“It has begun, apparently. We must hurry. The battle will start at once. If we can only

hold out until to-morrow, we'll show them!"

The door creaked and Shustry ran in. He caught his breath.

"Things are in a bad way!" he exclaimed. "Last night we surrendered Osennikovo and Steklitsy. The enemy has brought English tanks into the battle. Fomin has arrested eleven officers in the regiment that just arrived. They were planning to go over to the enemy with all their soldiers! The student officers are still holding out on the edge of the forest at Kras-tilit'sy."

Stepan hurriedly spread out the map, and all of them bent over it.

"Y-yes," he said.

"Ignatyev is now talking on direct wire to Moscow. He promised to follow me here if something urgent does not detain him."

"You see?" Stepan said, shaking his head. "There's nothing to be done about it. The matter is clear; there is no time. I am addressing myself to him who forgot about the kopeks. We must immediately move all the workers to the front, and for that reason, for precisely that reason, and not because he is guilty of anything, Zudin will be shot."

Silence, save for the rustle of the map that

was being spread out and the ticking of the watch on the secretary's wrist.

"Y-yes," Shcheglov finally forced out of himself. His face was grey, his eyes crumpled, and his Adam's apple twitched nervously, drowning his words. He breathed deeply. "If we were to tell—" he began—"if we were to tell about this struggle, this difficult struggle, to future generations——"

"We have no time to tell about it, brother," Stepan interrupted, rising quickly. "And besides it is possible that they would not believe us."

"Oh, they'll probably believe it, all right," Tkacheyev spoke through clenched teeth. "But it's true that most of them won't understand it. And the whiners will jabber a lot about victims and cruelty. Well, to hell with them! It isn't *their* kind who make the revolution!"

Again he pulled out the *makhorka* and lit a cigarette.

"Well, now, this is how the matter stands," Stepan resumed, narrowing his eyes and turning to the secretary. "Will you write down the following decree: 'The former chairman of the Provincial Cheka, Zudin, because he tore himself away from the masses of workers and

party members . . . and because he received into the service of the Cheka . . . a White Guard woman spy and bribe taker . . . the former ballet dancer, Citizen Valts . . . from whom Zudin accepted stockings and chocolate for his own family . . . and because of insufficient surveillance of matters entrusted to him . . . to Zudin, by the apparatus of the Provincial Cheka, in consequence of which . . . there developed the bribe-taking of the Cheka employee, Citizen Pavlov, and others, whose cases are now still continuing——' Have you written it down? Well then, go on: '. . . because of the above-mentioned crimes charged against him . . . Zudin has undermined the confidence of the working masses in the Soviet power . . . and at a critical moment, when the White Guards are advancing . . . he has wrought disastrous confusion in the united front of the toiling masses . . . therefore, the afore-mentioned Zudin, former chairman of the Provincial Cheka, and his assistant, Pavlov . . . and the former ballet dancer, Valts . . . are to be shot . . . Period. The sentence is to be executed immediately . . . Members of the trial commission . . . ' Ready?"

He took the decree, squinted, read it, and

signed his name. Tkacheyev also signed it. And Shcheglov signed it, his eyes excited and hard.

Shustry paced the room from one corner to another, in perplexity, searching the barren walls with his careworn eyes. Beyond the windows it had become quite blue, and they heard very distinctly now the intermittent rattling of window panes from the explosions of distant cannon.

Stepan turned to the secretary. "Will you see to it that Ignatyev's typist copies our decree at once? One of the copies must be sent immediately to the Central Committee, and another without delay to the printers. Within three hours, without fail, it must be pasted on all the streets and distributed to all the factories. And send a copy of it at once to the newspapers. Ignatyev and I will probably leave immediately for the front." He looked at his watch. "Only I must see Fomin again. I wonder what he has done at the Cheka during the night. By the way, couldn't you possibly go to see him, Tkacheyev?"

"No, it will be better if I get to the factories as soon as possible. By dinner time I will have made the rounds and gathered together some

strong workers' detachments. By evening all of them will be at the front. The sooner I get to the factories the better!"

"Yes, yes, yes. Good! And Shcheglov, you had better stay here," said Stepan, noticing that he was already hastily buttoning his overcoat. "You stay here and maintain communication with Moscow."

"Ekh!" said Shcheglov with displeasure. "I wanted to go to the factories myself right away——"

"No, I am afraid you'll have to spend this day at the Executive Committee. Tkacheyev will make the rounds of the factories with several other comrades. And it will be best if you stay here until we return. You talk directly with the Central Committee. Oh, yes, here is something else that I had almost forgotten. Yesterday evening I received an urgent telegram from Brigade Commander Shklyaev. He needs sixty machine guns very badly. I made arrangements yesterday and I suppose they're ready by now. You must send them to Shklyaev post-haste by automobile. Talk it over with Lavrukhin. I'd take them myself, but we'll probably go to Krastilitsy first. We'll have to see what the student officers are doing."

All of them had put on their coats; Shustry was pulling on his leather jacket. The secretary turned off the light and went out with the decree. The walls became dove-grey. Beyond the windows lay a milky fog. The panes quivered tautly and rattled.

Shustry approached Stepan. "Will you permit me to take those machine guns from Lavrukhin to Shklyayev? And perhaps I could also remain there as long as the situation is serious. You see, I have absolutely nothing else to do here now." And he dropped his head.

"Yes, yes. Go ahead. That will be excellent," Stepan answered.

All of them went to the door.

"Look here! One of us will have to go down to Zudin and tell him of our decision. Will you do it, Shcheglov?"

"No, Stepan! Please. I beg of you . . . I cannot . . . It's difficult for me."

"Well, I haven't the time, either. Evidently you'll have to do it, Tkachyev. Go down to him for a minute . . ."

They walked out of the room together in a business-like, hurried group. The deserted room was dark and gloomy. Cigarette butts and bits of paper littered the floor. On the red table-

cloth were the two pieces of the pencil that Stepan had broken. And the black, tightly-closed briefcase lay on the stool, forgotten by Shustry, and now suddenly unnecessary to anyone. A grey mist of stale tobacco-smoke hung motionless, a mute reminder of the thunder of the coming battle and the crack of the impending execution.

2

A long heavy chain pulled Zudin's hand, and he had no more strength to resist it. He moaned pitifully, turned around, and opened his eyes. The grey morning looked soberly into the room, and the figure of the bearded Tkachev stood unexpectedly beside his bed. Zudin jumped up. He felt suddenly very warm—even hot—and his heart beat against the walls of his chest like a machine gun.

"Did I wake you, comrade?"

How softly and joyously he spoke! Zudin's skin tingled with excitement, and perspiration stood out on his brow.

"Unfortunately, I could not wait. I am in a

hurry. And I was asked to inform you of our decision."

He sat down beside Zudin on the hard, prickly mattress of the rumpled bed. Zudin gazed thirstily into his heavy, downcast eyes.

"You are to be shot," he answered Zudin's mute question in a soft, sad voice.

"I knew it," Zudin whispered, and gently touched Tkacheyev's hand. "I knew it."

Tkacheyev sighed.

"It's a difficult matter, Comrade Zudin, difficult. But don't think that we did it because of hatred or revenge. There was simply no other way out." And Tkacheyev lifted his deep, sunken, tormented eyes to Zudin. "Of course, that Shustry talked a lot of nonsense. But he's a pretty good fellow, honest, sincere in his convictions. He's a little foolish, perhaps, but all of us can't be chasing after stars. Of course, we did not agree with him."

"But I thought——" But Zudin, as if afraid of something that had just flashed by, checked himself.

"No, we reasoned it out very simply. You are guilty. You were guilty. You have roused the suspicions of the masses so that our entire cause may be lost. You understand? . . . Not

we, but our cause. What devil ever moved you to take pity on that wench? Haven't we inherited enough of that refuse? Aren't you an old revolutionist? You should have looked only at the most important things, and therefore past her. But this ancient rot is obviously very sticky. No matter which one of us plumes himself, we're all alike, if you please, with very few exceptions. And then when we look up at this enormous mountain which we are so presumptuously climbing—why, then we are disgusted with ourselves. There's too much of that slime sticking to us! Of course, all of this would have been mere nonsense, if we were alone. We are what we are. . . . You can't make a black horse white. But it is *we* who do the pulling, *we* are the leaders! . . . There are times when I stand on the speaker's platform at a meeting and look around with my eyes narrowed at the multitude of those heads below, endless, like the waves of the sea.

"And you know, after all, the revolution, the rebuilding of the world on new foundations, is being done by them, by those very heads, and not by us alone. It is a mirage, comrade, self-deception, to think that we can do as we like in spite of them. Let fools think like that. We can-

not do anything worth doing with violence. No! All we can do is weld their elemental desires into a single will. We guard them from unproductive expenditures and thereby multiply the pressure of our class power a thousandfold and direct it towards the necessary goal. We do, and can do, only that which meets the simplest and crudest desires of those thousands of heads. The most exalted idea grows from the roots of the narrowest and greediest desires of the masses. And this is right, and this is good!

“‘Boys,’ we ask, ‘do you want a new, full life? Do you want to be freed from going around in your ragged boots in search of a dry crust of bread? Do you want to be rid of the gendarmes that have made workers rot in jails? I ask you, do you want that?’

“They roar, and flames burn in their eyes.

“‘I’ll show you how you can fix it so that everyone may get his share. Follow me! Break this! Beat that! Turn over the third!’ Then the cement and cast-iron walls, the steel rafters crack into rotten splinters, because it is they, these masses, who themselves know nothing, but now believe that they can get the desired fullness and freedom right away.

“But the walls are broken, the freedom has

been won. And yet there is no fullness, none at all! You see their tired, angry, distrustful eyes. And do you think you can deceive them? Don't you know yourself that the road to this fullness, though difficult, is certain? And so you look confidently, openly and honestly, right into their eyes, because you are right, because you do not lie to them, because you alone are loyal to their widest interests. Gradually they calm down.

" 'But where is that fullness?' they ask.

" 'Comrades, you are too impatient! You have climbed only the first step. Arm yourselves with endurance and with hatred against the enemy, so that with the same daring pressure we may all mount higher and higher. Don't you see that the plenty you desire is coming closer and closer?'

" 'We see, we see! Of course!' they shout delightedly. But they see absolutely nothing at all, and they will not see it soon. They merely sincerely believe that they see it.

" 'You lead them and they love you blindly, and they adore you. You are their hero. You are the chevalier of all their medals, decorations, regalias, rattles. You are their god, their dictator, their good genius. In a word, you are

everything to them. With them you break down all the barriers that cross your way, and this mass is ready to lay down its life for you as one man. For the sake of plenty? No! Do you know, there are moments when they entirely forget that plenty. They are carried away by the wonderful scope, by the very process of the struggle itself. But don't think that you can pull all these masses after you, by taking advantage of their mere enthusiasm. The beacon of this plenty, for the sake of which they rose, must burn before them continually, steadily, and be ever brighter and nearer and more tangible. Only then will our success in bettering the structure of human society be guaranteed. Only then will the masses be ready to lay down their lives for the sake of the struggle, for the sake of your idea, which perhaps they do not know and do not understand very well, but which they sense instinctively and clearly. They feel it in you, in your heart, in your image, in the form of your honesty, in your open love for them, a love which is ready every minute to face death for their happiness, for the happiness of the suffering ones. Then do you become the pulse, the heart, the brain, of all this great mass. And you may perform

with it the greatest fairy tales of marvellous, wonderful enterprises, such as the world has never seen. But take care that you make no mistake. Calculate everything, weigh it, think it over, check and countercheck every personal and social step. Penetrate into the essence of everything, so that later, when you face some unexpected obstacle, you will not exhibit even the shadow of embarrassment, but will cry out jestingly: 'It is nothing!'

"Here, just look at yourself. How your eyes are shining, and how you look me right in the eyes! But just think, just imagine, suppose one of these mighty leaders who calls and guides the tremendous masses of hungry, greedy sufferers to the struggle, to destruction, to acts of heroism—do you understand?—to acts of self-sacrifice—should bend down and, without thinking, put into his pocket some bit of the old luxury; and suppose everyone should see it! Think of it!"

Tkachev sighed and shook his head.

"You and I have climbed pretty high, comrade. You can't hide anywhere. What's to be done about it? The struggle is too cruel, too dangerous. Out of mistakes and defeats have been woven the sails of suspicion. Everyone

looks sharply at his fellow. Everyone watches our mutual attainments. We are suspicious. Shustry is suspicious. And you are suspicious. . . . Don't shake your head! I saw how you regarded us there in the committee. You looked at us as if we were a narrow-minded, intolerant council, hostile to you. That's how it felt at the time. . . . And now the working masses stop, swing sharply back, brandish their fists.

"'Traitor! Betrayer! And what about the rest of you? . . . Well, of course, you say this and that, but you're all alike! You're all tarred with the same brush. Beat them!' comes one bold, provocative voice. . . . Tell me: what shall we do now? One more second of hesitation and we shall all be torn to bits. Then it will be too late. Explanations are impossible! The enemy is advancing, the city will fall, if we do not move the entire mass of workers into the battle at once!

"The mass will never understand long justifications. The mass understands only the monosyllabic 'Yes' or 'No.' The whole cause—do you understand?—the whole great cause of fighting for the happiness of millions of people, all that has already been gained with so many sacrifices, so much effort, with the suffering

and blood of several generations, right here and now all of this will turn to smoke, burst like a soap bubble, because of the childish carelessness of one unfortunate comrade who grew tired, who tore himself away from the masses, and who quite forgot who he was and where he was! Tell me, what shall we do with him, so we may save our great cause?"

"Kill him," Zudin said in a strained, muffled voice.

"Yes, kill him," Tkacheyev confirmed. "And so we are killing you to save our cause, knowing that you understand all this. . . ."

Tkacheyev pressed Zudin's hand firmly and rose. "Yes, all of this is so difficult if one is to begin to analyse it as it should be analysed. Shcheglov even proposed that we should not kill you, but only make a pretence of killing you, make a gesture of sincerity, and then hide you somewhere—well, send you abroad for ever to do underground work under another name. But it's too difficult to do this, brother. It is incredibly difficult to do something that must remain unknown, unnoticed. We are being watched constantly by all eyes. And besides, we are a party, a colossally large party, and there are all kinds of people in our midst. I'm not

talking now about those suspicious people in uniforms of various kinds who greedily sniff the air in all directions and should be watched and watched closely. But how many there are who are honest and sincere, and who struggle forward, hand in hand with us. And yet, let there arise the least confusion in our ranks, the least hitch—as now, for example—and immediately their faces will become deathly pale, their tongues will twist and shrivel, and they will clutch frantically at the first straw they see, which itself will be sinking, you know. Do you mean to tell me that there are few such? Well, now, suppose that we were to announce to these honest, devoted people: ‘Do you know, Zudin has done some very bad things without realising it at all!’ What do you think? Would they understand? Would they believe? Not later, when the long wild struggle for the reconstruction of the entire world has even reconstructed their own brains—not then, but now, right now, when everything is as it is? No one would believe! Do you understand? No one will believe . . . just remember Shustry! . . . And do you know what they would think?” Tkachev angrily waved his hand. “The devil alone knows what they will think! . . . And

these dangers in the shape of chocolate, silk, ballet dancers, gold, wine, music, pictures, candy, and all other such nonsense and spillikins, in which essentially there is absolutely nothing despicable or bad, but to which the masses are unaccustomed, and which are now absolutely unavailable to the masses, because there isn't enough of that sort of thing for all of them, since all we have are only remnants of the tawdry shell of the former rulers—tell me, aren't there too many such dangers under our feet? And I mean under the feet of all of us who are marching ahead, under the feet of the entire party. Do you think that the temptation is not great? Do you think that we can boast of many in the party who possess the monkish asceticism of the underground movement? And even they, how long will they last?" And again he angrily shook his head. "Well, and what would all of them say when they learned that their old, tried, and, one might think, most honest comrade, Zudin, who had 'villainously deceived all'—and this, my brother, would be true, because you have 'deceived,' and, what is more, 'villainously deceived all'—and who had taken bribes of chocolate, silk, and gold—and you will never

be able to dissuade them of the latter, because age-long want has made them suspicious about such things—and who had been ostensibly shot, had been—indeed, indeed—hidden! . . . By the leaders! . . . ‘Ai, these are fine leaders!’ . . . Do you understand, Zudin, that this would be a beneficent, warm spring rain over the timid little shoots of brazen robberies, hypocritical careerism, and similar weeds which now are eagerly sprouting and trying to grow up and destroy our cause? ‘If Zudin did it and went unscathed, then why can’t we?’ And so we must punish you, make an example of you to teach a lesson to others. Oh, of course, at another time, we could have explained all this at our leisure, and transferred you to other work. But now you can see for yourself there is no time. There is no time! We must immediately build up the confidence that you have violated, and move the masses into a battle for life or death. That is why we are answering this with a thunderous, bloody blow. We shout to all of them, and to ourselves first of all:

“ ‘Merciless terror! Bloody horror! For all who forget, for all who grow tired, for anyone who has dared to place himself in front of the millions, of the masses of the entire world in the

cause of revolution without having gauged his own powers!"

"And look how firmly, how undeviatingly, like the sharpest steel wedge, we move forward and forward, unconquerable! Sometimes tiny bits of the steel snap off, crumbling under the terrific pressure, for the struggle demands victims and sacrifices. And sometimes something within ourselves may break pitifully, but the next man in the ranks will jump into the empty place, and our sharp wedge will drive on. And on the crest of what a gigantic world wave have we made of ourselves this daring wedge, and how accurately we cut through the poisonous growth, hardened by scores of thousands of years of rottenness in the body of all of humanity—the exploitation of man by man! And we shall reach our goal, but only if we remain sincere, honest, and strongly welded with our class, equally merciless with ourselves and others. Such, Zudin, is *our* destiny and yours. . . . Well, now let us speak of certain details. We have decided not to delay, to execute the sentence to-day. Shouldn't that be so?" And Tkacheyev again pressed Zudin's hand. "Valts and Pavlov must have been shot this morning."

He was silent for a moment.

"Besides this, your wife and children have begged to see you. We have refused to permit them until to-day, but to-day—well, just as you wish. They should be coming to the commandant any time now, and you may decide whether you want to see them, or whether we should send them away."

Zudin shrank painfully, twisting his mouth and drawing the air through his teeth.

"Let them come," he said in a tired voice.

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Don't be angry, brother. You're a brave fellow."

But Zudin could stand no longer. Sinking helplessly, he lay down on the bed and looked straight up at the ceiling.

3

Long ago in the childhood which he could never forget, he often used to lie face up, as now, looking, not at the ceiling, no, but at something that seemed suddenly terribly akin—the

blue, bottomless sky. He used to cling to the earth with his hands to keep from falling. In the wide spaces above his head long thin threads of silver cobwebs waved in the light breeze. Near by in the ravine, thickly overgrown with dry, prickly, turnip-like weeds, brightly - coloured bluejays swooped and screamed. It was gay and peaceful, and yet, at the same time, it seemed poignantly sad. There was a fragrance of drying grass, warm in the rays of the setting sun, and not far away a little pool glistened with bright bubbles and large, golden-green mysterious flies. He tried not to remember that behind a dirty yard just around the corner, in a low mouldy cellar, he was being awaited impatiently by his sickly mother who had sent him to the store for blue-
ing. She would be standing there, her withered breasts drooping under her ragged dress, her fingers wrinkled and bleached and sometimes bleeding from the endless washing. And now Zudin knew that old sadness; but why it was, he could not tell either then or now.

Suddenly he heard familiar voices in the corridor. He leapt up, hastily arranged his bed, and, trying to smile, watched Lisa make her way timidly past the sentry into the room,

Mitya and Masha pressing against her skirts in fright.

In the same old, worn-out felt boots! With unnatural ease and gaiety, he extended his hands to them.

"Well, hello! How are you? Did you miss me? Were you frightened?" He stared curiously at Lisa, who suddenly sank back, exhausted, and sat down on the stool.

"Lyosha, my darling! What's it all about? What's it all about?" And she began to weep hysterically.

"Ekh, Lisa! What a cry-baby you are, indeed! What unusual thing has happened, I ask you? I was arrested for a couple of days. It seems that you should be accustomed to it by now!"

"Yes, but in those days it used to be the gendarmes. Now it's our own people. And everyone says—everyone says that it's the end for us, that you have already been shot, that they found some gold, chocolate . . . Lyosha, darling! It's such a torture! It's such a torture! Try to understand." And she wept profusely, her whole body quivering, sobbing out only the sounds of words.

"Never mind what people say! Don't you

know the truth? Then why are you frightened? Are you afraid of the gossip of some old women around the gates? Well, now, all right! Come, come, stop it, calm yourself! It's all passed now and there's nothing more to cry about. That's right, smile. . . . Mitya! Masha! Sit down on Father's lap. I'll show you how the Cossacks gallop on horseback. Don't be afraid. Like this. . . . Now hold tightly to my coat with your hands. 'The Cossack went a-galloping, a-galloping, a-galloping . . . '

He put the children abruptly down on the floor. "Well, now, Lisa, why do you keep on weeping? Will you go on like this until the stool under you falls apart? Tell me, why are you crying?"

"Lyosha, my darling, I'm afraid. I don't know anything, and I don't understand anything. What? For what? Why?"

"But there's nothing to understand. The White Guards took advantage of the fact that you and I took some chocolate and some stockings, and invented something. I was arrested so that they might investigate. Now they have discovered that it's all a lie, and the case is finished."

"Akh, Lyosha, Lyosha! I was so frightened.

Do you know they arrested me, too, the very same day? There was a search, and they turned everything upside down. And for two days I could not leave the apartment. And there was a sentry at the door. People filled the yard. They gathered from all over, from blocks around, and threatened to break the windows—both the bourgeois and our own lot. The guards could hardly chase them away. Then some brisk little fellow came—he had close-cropped hair and he carried a briefcase. He tortured me with his questions, wanting to know whether I took the gold or whether you did. I shook all over, I didn't understand anything. Everyone said that you were no longer alive. Well, afterward they took the sentry away and told me I could go wherever I pleased. Only they wouldn't let me come to you. And besides I was afraid to go beyond my yard, and at the same time it was difficult to stay at home. . . . And then, you know, they said all sorts of ugly things about you. They said . . . that you lived . . . with Valts!" Her face was scarlet with shame. "Lyosha, is it true? You? Did you . . ."

"What are you saying, Lisa? What utter nonsense indeed! I am what I have always

been—your faithful and constant Alexey.”

She breathed a sigh of relief.

“Well, what will happen now? You say that the case is finished? So they’ll free you right away. Without you, you know, we are helpless. I have already lost my head. The guns keep howling all day long, especially to-day. The bourgeois are hissing on all the street corners. You know, of course, they say that to-day the city may be surrendered——”

He straightened out like an arrow, and seemed turned to stone.

“Surrender the city? No, that’s a lie! Do you understand? That is a lie!”

He walked quickly back and forth, peering out of the windows.

“Lyosha! How thin and worn you have become! Don’t they feed you here at all?”

“What are you saying? . . . What are you talking about? . . . Yes, of course they feed me! . . . Calm yourself. I get excellent food. I am thin because I caught cold and was ill for a while. I hadn’t noticed that a little window was open. But that’s all over now. To-morrow I shall be free. Only, do you know, Lisa, it’s a very unpleasant case. Valts proved to be nothing more nor less than a White Guard agent

and a thief! Do you remember how I told you that we shouldn't have taken the stockings and the chocolate? Oh, how right I was! She's got me into such a mess, that after this I simply cannot remain in Russia. The Central Committee is sending me abroad on urgent business—to Australia on a mission. That is very, very far away, and the mission will take—at the very least—a year, if not longer. The worst thing in all this is that I will not be able to write to you. You see, it's beyond the ocean, on the other side of the world. It is possible I shall have to be away for several years—perhaps ten, and perhaps even more. And it can't be helped: isn't the revolution and the happiness of the whole world more precious for me? Well, now, tell me?" And he looked caressingly into her tear-filled eyes which she pressed to his warm hand.

"Lyosha!" she pleaded. "How terrible! To be orphaned, to remain all alone in the entire world without you? Lyosha, my darling, my precious one! Tell them somehow that you cannot do it. Don't go away, you who are dearer to me than my own life!"

"What nonsense you are talking! And you are the wife of a revolutionist! Be proud that

your husband is forsaking his family, his native country, perhaps for a long time, perhaps for ever, and is going to the other end of the world to break the chains of all of us! Lizochka, my darling, just think of it! Isn't it a source of the greatest pride?"

A long, heavy silence set in, broken only by Lisa's subdued sobbing.

"You will not be all alone. The children will be given a helping hand. You'll be all right. In case you get into any difficulties, hunt up Shcheglov . . . Vasily Prokofich. He has just come here from Moscow. Everything will be all right. And you go back to the factory. In fact, I insist that you go back to the factory. For the time being, you can send the children to the aunt in the village. And besides, you will be utterly free. You see, it is possible that I may not return at all. I will not be hurt if you should marry someone else, as long as he is as honest and brave as I am. As a matter of fact, it would be even better if you do that, rather than lead a sort of nun-like life, sighing over the past. But, of course, if you do that, don't forget the children. You must make good, strong people of them, the kind who will dare to take life by the throat, not the kind who will

bow down before it!"

"Lyosha, I am afraid. You speak so strangely now—as if you were really bidding me farewell. Is it possible that you are hiding something horrible from me?"

"You silly girl! What have I to hide? Nothing horrible threatens me, or I would be behaving quite differently. I simply look at things soberly and say: very soon I must go away, very far away, and perhaps we shall never meet again. In fact, I am very much afraid that the order to depart may come very quickly—let's say, for instance, to-morrow morning. Then this meeting may prove, against our will, our very last. So let us say good-bye now as if for ever. And that will make our new meeting all the more joyous, you see—if that should take place."

They embraced tenderly.

He walked away and began to smooth the hair of the children, who had become frightened.

Only Lisa's sobs continued, like the sound of freshets in the sun after a storm has passed—in an hour they will be gone.

"Ekha, Lyosha! If you only knew how hard it is to endure all this! How unbearable it all is,

as if all our life had suddenly come to nothing! Of course, I am proud of you, very proud indeed! You are my dear one, my only one. You are not like others. And that is why I love you so. But to live without you, to know that far away in a strange country you are wandering all alone, that perhaps you have perished, and I'm the only one who doesn't know about it, and will never, never find out about it!—tell me, isn't that torture? Ah, Lyosha, Lyosha, I have no more strength within me! All of my life, you see, all of my life from the moment I met you, I have been like an accursed one, always worried, always tormenting myself with the eternal torture of my love. And this is where all this torment brought me. That's all . . .”

And in boundless grief, this plain, pale woman, her eyes transparent from weeping, seemed to be seeking something through the depths of the floor, trying to find something there, in its abyss. . . . But she found nothing.

“Lisa, the time limit for a meeting here is only ten minutes. That is the rule, and I am afraid that we have overstepped the limit considerably. Get ready, my joy. Better come again to-morrow, but before you come, call up the

commandant on the telephone and ask him whether I've gone away."

Sighing heavily, Lisa began to make ready, wrapping her head in the warm shawl.

"Lisa, here's something else. I can't imagine how I've forgotten to warn you about the principal thing. What I told you here about my departure is a tremendously important party secret. No one must ever know about it. Do you understand? You must swear to me that you will never say a word about it to anyone. If you do, I shall perish immediately. Do you understand? No one, except three members of the Central Committee and you, will know about it. For all the others, an announcement will be widely published that, for having trusted the White Guards, Zudin has been shot. Do you understand? It will be printed everywhere . . . for having trusted them, and for bribes. It cannot be otherwise, for, after all, I did trust one of them, and therein lies my guilt, Lisa! . . . But all of this will be a lie. You will know the real truth, that I am alive, but that I have gone very far away, and that's all. . . . Well, farewell, Lizochka. Be brave!"

He quickly kissed his children, and leaning his elbow on the table, his lips drawn back in a set,

forced smile, he watched his wife, bowed with grief, go out into the corridor. The children, pitiful and frightened, clung to her skirts, and afterward, from the distance, he could hear their ringing little voices, so dear and so precious to him. . . .

Only then he could hold out no longer. He flung himself on the bed and wept soundlessly, his whole body twitching and his face buried in the pillow.

4

Everything was over now. Ahead of him was only a small, insignificant moment, the tedious, empty little moment of death.

It's all over! How many people say and have said those words without understanding that when they say them they are lying stupidly! They think of something terrible and horrible which may begin at any moment, uninvited, and take the place of something ordinary and familiar, something they have known all their lives. Why don't they say then, "Something frightful is beginning"? But no, they say, "Everything is finished."

Well, now, here something is finished that really is finished! There is nothing else ahead, not one little thing, not even death, because I will not feel it. I may, perhaps, feel sharp physical pain, but even that, most likely, for only a tenth of a second—the last sensation of departing life. But death, death itself I will never feel, because there is no death. There is no death for the living man. And the dead man cannot feel it. Of course, from one point of view, to part with life is very difficult. It is unpleasant to realise that they will kill me and defame me, and that everyone will know that that climber and scoundrel, that Zudin, the former chairman of the Provincial Cheka, was caught taking bribes, and was shot in the interests of the victory over capitalism!

Oh, if I could live on, only a little longer! If I could work a bit more! ... If I could go to the front right now! ... How new and joyous this life would seem to me! And how differently I could direct it now. . . .

There is bitter shame ahead for the children, when they grow up and hear from everyone around them my despised name, sullied by all. They will learn all the details, and they will curse the memory of their own father! Could

it not have been done somehow without this? What a pity that I did not touch upon it during my talk with Tkacheyev! It simply didn't occur to me before.

Putting his hands in his pockets, Zudin walked to the window, the panes of which shivered and rattled from the frequent explosions. He looked at the river. The ice floated as obstinately and beautifully as before, although everything around was overcast and damp. Below, beyond the yellow wall, children played on the stone pavement of the street. He could tell they were children from their voices and from the movements of the little hands that flashed above the wall. Sometimes a little girl in a short plush overcoat and with thin braids of hair hopped on one foot, jumping over the wide squares she had drawn herself with chalk on the stone pavement, and her little braids jerked up and down. Zudin remembered his Masha, and again a hard lump began to swell in his throat. But he mastered himself and sat down calmly at the table.

And, perhaps, to stigmatise his name was the only possible way. After all, essentially, only one thing was important: the cause. The cause that was bringing happiness as quickly as pos-

sible to everyone must not perish! This was the only thing that was important, and the stigma . . . Zudin grew thoughtful.

Well, and what would happen if they shot him now, and later told everybody that they had killed a very good comrade? How absurd it would be! Then no one would understand anything, and what was most important, no one would ever believe it. They would say: "If he was not guilty, then why did you kill him? Something must be wrong here!" And all would begin to think something quite different from what they should think. And some, listening intently, would laugh slyly, and, like greedy mice, drag fat crumbs of grain caviar to their little holes, and bottles of wine, and make merry with their secretaries as they smeared the mouths of the starving with clay. Or perhaps there are none like that!

And how many of the most honest comrades eagerly pick up these remnants of chocolate, these ballet dancers and other broken pieces, in order to preserve carefully, like art lovers, the sacred culture of the past! And for the sake of this culture, this rubbish, perhaps they will take the last hard crust of bread from thousands of new, delicate, as yet untried lives, so young, and

condemned now to certain death by starvation. How could he help crying out harshly and boldly into the faces of all such second-hand dealers so that his cry might resound as a bloody blow in the face: "Look at Zudin! There was a scoundrel, who, for the sake of the past, forgot the future for one moment! He was killed like a despised creature, like a dog! Are you tempted by his fate? Then cast aside all this old rubbish, all this trash, no matter how beautiful, no matter how valuable it may be, and think only of the future! Think only of the future and of the present!"

And it may be, thought Zudin, there will be individuals like this who, because of their work and their mode of living, may find themselves farther and farther away from the masses, and who in their loneliness may begin to philosophise and to wonder—the devil has many tricks!—how to save the revolution . . . from the masses, from the workers, from rebellion! And they will philosophise themselves . . . to ballet dancers and chocolate! And puffing Havana cigars, cooling their chocolate in delicate porcelain cups, playing with the heavy watch chains on their vests, they will mutter:

"We, Communists . . ."

What? And how about Zudin? Or have you forgotten that scoundrel, that villain who was killed for your sake?

No, let that insignificant, wretched name creep into your brains, and let it become from now on the symbol of baseness, villainy, and treachery to the most honest, the purest cause of permanent, eternal revolution, for the happiness of all the dispossessed in this stubborn movement forward! Only for the future, and only for the happiness of the unfortunate does Communism exist. And for the sake of this, it is worth while to live, and worth while to die! ...

Proudly, gaily, Zudin sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing. Then, quickly sitting down again at the table, he began to drum upon it impatiently with his fingers.

In the distance, beyond the river, endless columns of workers streamed in a black mass. And as they marched, the spring air rang with their lusty voices, raised in the "Internationale."

THE END

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